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## **IN THE SIDE SHOWS**



Univ. of  
California





[Photo : C. Vandyk, Ltd.]

**CAPTAIN WEDGWOOD BENN, D.S.O., D.F.C., M.P.**





# IN THE SIDE SHOWS

BY  
CAPTAIN WEDGWOOD BENN  
D.S.O., D.F.C., M.P.

THE  
LONDON  
STATIONERS' COMPANY

HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO  
MCMXIX

De 40  
B 51

De 40  
B 51

## INTRODUCTION

THE following pages hardly touch on the famous incidents of the War. There is no record of its chief events, no echo of its great controversies. This book is the simple diary of a citizen soldier, a story of four years of happy adventure whose measure of variety was pressed down and running over.

But I have attempted more than a story. The War was an education for millions and I have tried to explain how it influenced me.

The beginning was so fair. Never has our country outdone in honour her deeds of 1914. To have championed a small nation assailed by a bully; to have received the oppressed and outcast in thousands as welcome friends; to have found in the casualty lists an irresistible recruiting-sergeant; that is the record not of one class but of the whole people, of the whole empire. The laurels of those days will never fade.

But the spirit of the time threw a glamour, too, over the circumstance of war. Militarism seemed after all the true model. The true test, ordeal by battle.

Is there anyone who, remembering 1914, feels

satisfied with to-day? Is there anyone, now, who will deny that, step by step, warfare degrades a nation? The low appeal succeeds the high. The worse example prevails over the better. Our present danger is lest our sense of international brotherhood should grow feeble, our sense of chivalry blunt, lest suspicion and dislike, restriction and exclusion, should become our watchwords. There are even those who would have us follow in the ways of the Power that was overthrown.

Against this danger I believe that we may safely look to the soldiers to shield us. They know from bitter experience what militarism really means; its stupidity, its brutality, its waste. They are chivalrous because they have learned the one good thing that war can teach, namely, that peril shared knits hearts together—yes, even between enemies. They have mingled with strangers. They know that common folk the world over love peace and in the main desire goodwill.

They have earned the right to say that the high ideals of 1914 shall not be lowered in the hour of Victory.

W. B.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
THE NATIONAL RELIEF FUND . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II	
WITH THE YEOMANRY TO EGYPT . . . . .	5
CHAPTER III	
LIFE IN THE DESERT . . . . .	14
CHAPTER IV	
FROM EGYPT TO GALLIPOLI . . . . .	17
CHAPTER V	
THE LAST FIGHT AT SUVLA BAY . . . . .	23
CHAPTER VI	
THE BOREDOM OF THE DARDANELLES . . . . .	37
CHAPTER VII	
THE MILITARY MACHINE . . . . .	50
CHAPTER VIII	
THE SYSTEM AND THE RANKS . . . . .	55
CHAPTER IX	
THE SYSTEM AND THE OFFICER . . . . .	60



	PAGE
CHAPTER X	
IS MILITARISM A SURE DEFENCE? . . . . .	67
CHAPTER XI	
SEAPLANES IN THE EAST . . . . .	75
CHAPTER XII	
EL ARISH AND JAFFA . . . . .	82
CHAPTER XIII	
JUNE FLYING IN THE ADEN HINTERLAND . . . . .	88
CHAPTER XIV	
THE KING OF THE HEDJAZ—"MECCA ONE" . . . . .	95
CHAPTER XV	
HOME VIA THE SUDAN . . . . .	100
CHAPTER XVI	
PATROLLING THE SYRIAN AND ARABIAN COASTS . . . . .	107
CHAPTER XVII	
AN AIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BAGDAD RAILWAY . . . . .	119
CHAPTER XVIII	
MAINLY ABOUT CYPRUS . . . . .	128
CHAPTER XIX	
THE LUCKLESS "PERISVET" . . . . .	133
CHAPTER XX	
THE LOSS OF THE "BEN-MY-CHREE" . . . . .	143
CHAPTER XXI	
AN ADMIRABLE CRICHTON . . . . .	154

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXII</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>THE EVACUATION OF CASTELORIZO . . . . .</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXIII</b>	
<b>DINING WITH THE OMDEH . . . . .</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXIV</b>	
<b>A MUDIE AT WORK . . . . .</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXV</b>	
<b>A COPTIC WEDDING . . . . .</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXVI</b>	
<b>MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT AND VOLUNTARY RATES . . .</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXVII</b>	
<b>AN EGYPTIAN GENTLEMAN'S OPINIONS . . . . .</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXVIII</b>	
<b>BRITISH OFFICIALS IN EGYPT . . . . .</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXIX</b>	
<b>GETTING "WINGS" . . . . .</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXX</b>	
<b>AIRCRAFT v. SUBMARINES . . . . .</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXI</b>	
<b>THE BOURBON KINGDOM . . . . .</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXII</b>	
<b>OUR ITALIAN AIR ALLIANCE . . . . .</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXIII</b>	
<b>TWO WINGS AT WORK . . . . .</b>	<b>223</b>

# **CONTENTS**

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXIV</b>	
<b>AIR RAIDS FROM BOTH POINTS OF VIEW . . . .</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXV</b>	
<b>THE HOME OF PETRARCH AND VIRGIL . . . .</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXVI</b>	
<b>CHIVALRY AND BATTLE . . . . .</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXVII</b>	
<b>TUSCAN CITIES . . . . .</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXVIII</b>	
<b>PERUGIA—ASSISI—ORVIETO—CASSINO . . . .</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>CHAPTER XXXIX</b>	
<b>THE ADRIATIC COAST . . . . .</b>	<b>268</b>
<b>CHAPTER XL</b>	
<b>ON SECRET SERVICE . . . . .</b>	<b>278</b>
<b>CHAPTER XLI</b>	
<b>BARKER, V.C. . . . .</b>	<b>284</b>
<b>CHAPTER XLII</b>	
<b>IF WE FAILED ! . . . . .</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>CHAPTER XLIII</b>	
<b>AN AIR-FIGHT IN THE DARK . . . . .</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>CHAPTER XLIV</b>	
<b>WE DROP TANDURA . . . . .</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>CHAPTER XLV</b>	
<b>THE LIFE OF A SPY . . . . .</b>	<b>306</b>

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

**Captain Wedgwood Benn, D.S.O., D.F.C., M.P.    *Frontispiece***

	FACING PAGE
Our dug-out at Chocolate Hill. On right Major Lafone, V.C., Middlesex Yeomanry . . . . .	48
Middlesex Yeomanry landing at Suvla, August 17th, 1915 . . . . .	48
Commander Samson and Captain Benn wrecked off Jaffa . . . . .	65
H.M. Seaplane Carrier <i>Ben-my-Chree</i> . . . . .	96
Bomb hitting goods trains at Afuleh, August, 1916. Pilot, Commander Samson. Observer, Captain Benn . . . . .	113
Commander Samson, D.S.O. . . . .	128
Bomb dropped by Captain Benn on Chikaldir Bridge, Bagdad Railway . . . . .	145
View of Castelorizo Harbour . . . . .	160
Two views of the Defence Post at the Greek Church, Castelorizo . . . . .	177
Commander Samson and Captain Benn . . . . .	208
Bombs photographed as they are leaving the machine. View shows hilly ground below with roads and woods . . . . .	225
Facsimile of one of the messages dropped by the Austrians giving details of the fate of British Aviators . . .	240

	FACING PAGE
The enemy honour our dead. Photograph dropped by the Austrian Flying Corps . . . . .	257
Funeral of British Pilots. Photograph dropped by the Austrian Flying Corps . . . . .	272
Colonel Barker, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., D.F.C. . . . .	289
Machine fitted with special apparatus for dropping man with parachute . . . . .	304

## MAPS

DARDANELLES . . . . .	24
ARABIA AND SUDAN . . . . .	72
SYRIA AND PALESTINE . . . . .	88
ITALY . . . . .	200

# IN THE SIDE SHOWS

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATIONAL RELIEF FUND

FOR the first two months of the War my interest was absorbed in the National Relief Fund. The Fund came into being in the following way. In 1912 there had been a great London Dock strike, and Lord Tullibardine, now Duke of Atholl, and I had raised, with the assistance of the *Daily News*, a large sum of money for the relief of the dependants of the strikers. On Friday, July 31st, 1914, I was talking over with Mr. A. P. Nicholson, of the *Daily News*, the imminent declaration of war and its consequences. We both agreed—and, indeed, it was then the general opinion—that considerable industrial distress must immediately follow the outbreak of hostilities. Discussing the Dock Fund, Mr. Nicholson suggested that, as the present task of relief would be beyond the power of one newspaper, all the Press should be asked to associate in a united effort. On this idea I immediately began to work, and that evening had a talk with Lord Burnham at his office in Fleet Street. Lord Burnham made, however, an even better suggestion, which was that we should ask the Prince of Wales

## 2 IN THE SIDE SHOWS

to become President of a National Fund. Once the Prince of Wales's consent had been given, progress was made by leaps and bounds. The characteristic of those days was an outburst of national energy the like of which had never been seen. Everybody was determined to do something, and was uncontrollably impatient at being kept waiting. Inevitably the organising skill to find real work for this enormous new force was lacking. But its momentum prevailed. People who had never made a decision in their lives felt the urge, and things were settled in two minutes which would normally have been the subject of many months of correspondence. It was the great opportunity for ideas. The one thing needed was the man who could devise any scheme to crystallise into action the molten flood of energy. Who, for example, would have thought it possible to secure the stables at Buckingham Palace as a Post Office ; York House as an office ; or a free frank for all correspondence relating to a charitable fund ? And yet minor arrangements of this kind were made without difficulty over the telephone. Such was the determination of everyone to get something done.

The most fortunate thing that happened to us after gaining the consent of the Prince of Wales to be President was the appearance of Sir Arthur Pearson, who came one day to the House of Commons Lobby, led by a friend. I had never seen him before, and only knew him by name, but I was at once deeply impressed by his vigour. He knew what was wanted, couldn't he be allowed to do it ? It was the spirit of Pitt saying that he alone could save England. Money began to pour in. Sir Arthur, assisted by Sir

Hedley Le Bas, had by August 14th secured a million—by September two millions; and by May 15th of the next year five millions had been collected. Sir Edward Coates and Sir L. G. Halsey generously undertook the control and temporary investment of these large funds. Where the scheme was at fault was, of course, in the failure to appreciate, first, the gigantic character of a world-war and its great duration, and, secondly, the fact that the absence of millions of men would set up a condition of universal employment and false prosperity, which made an industrial relief fund for the time unnecessary. It can be claimed, however, that very useful work was done in providing separation allowances for the wives of thousands of newly-enrolled soldiers. The War Office machinery was utterly insufficient to cope with this, and I do not know what would have happened to the unfortunate dependants of those who were the first to come forward in the defence of their country if large sums had not been available each week from the money so generously contributed.

By October the general lines of the collection had been decided on, as well as the outline of the method of distributing the money. The pioneer stage of the work was therefore complete, and what remained was not enough to satisfy my craving for really active service. To live in London engaged in routine work became a positive torture. Accordingly, in October I joined the Middlesex Yeomanry, and resigned the Chairmanship of the Committee of the Fund.

I must put on record a charming and touching letter which I received from Sir Arthur Pearson. "I



shall always feel," he said, "that I owe to you the fact that in spite of my handicap I have been able to be of some use to the country in the days when it was imperative on all to lend a hand." What the Fund owed to Sir Arthur's electric personality and unbounded store of energy is incalculable. His subsequent services to the cause of the blind are part of national history.

The Committee of which I was Chairman, and which controlled both the collection and distribution of the Fund, may be said to have set the fashion in War Coalitions, inasmuch as it included Mr. Arthur Balfour, the Duke of Devonshire, Sir George Riddell, Sir George Murray, Mr. McKinnon Wood, Mr. Arthur Henderson, Mr. Walter Long, Mr. Birrell, Lord Downham and Mr. Masterman, as well as Lady Kerry, Mrs. McKenna, Miss Markham and Miss Macarthur.

On joining the Middlesex Yeomanry I wrote to Percy Illingworth, the chief Government Whip, resigning my position as a junior, but this resignation he for a time refused to accept. I shall never forget the cheerful and willing way in which he undertook the work which I had left undone in the office. He sent me a kind and unselfish letter which was a mark of the man, whose death, an irreparable loss to Liberalism, was in no small measure due to the severe strain of doing the work of his colleagues absent on service.

## CHAPTER II

### WITH THE YEOMANRY TO EGYPT

JOINING the Yeomanry was for me a very great adventure, for I had never served as a soldier before. I made the usual hurried purchases from the outfitters, buying everything I was told to buy, and preparing myself for a thousand tasks which I was never likely to be called upon to perform.

I set off with my new kit to join the Middlesex Yeomanry at Moulshord in Berkshire. They were occupying Cranford House, where I shared a garret with Charles Lister, a brilliant colleague who, after being thrice wounded, died in the Dardanelles campaign.

I was delighted to find that the second-in-command of the regiment was Harry Brodie, an old Parliamentary colleague of the years of Liberal triumph, 1906-10. The commanding officer was "Scatters" Wilson, whom at that time I hardly knew, but whom the War turned into a much-valued friend.

In those days we actually kept our kit packed, awaiting hourly the order to move, just taking out each night sufficient for immediate needs. It was some weeks before any word came, but finally amidst great excitement we were ordered to entrain at Read-

ing, a few miles away, and were told that we were bound for Mundesley on the East Coast. Nobody, of course, really believed this. Everybody described it as "camouflage"—a word then beginning to gain favour. We were convinced that our services were required in the victorious stand which we believed was being made in Flanders.

I am afraid our move to Reading was not a performance very creditable to a cavalry regiment. I remember with horror the way in which my own saddle was packed—more suitable to a gipsy caravan than to a smart unit of the *Arme Blanche*. The transport, which everyone appeared to hold in contempt, was not a very grand spectacle, and I know that one driver, unable to control his horses, landed in a field with a broken leg! To compare that entraining at Reading—which took several hours—with the smart entraining of the same regiment two years later when departing from Egypt for Salonica, shows a degree of improvement and a standard of perfection which prove what splendid material there was in the Yeomanry. We travelled all night and in the morning arrived, sure enough, at Cromer. It was very cold. There was some sleet and a strong wind, and we were consigned to a small field on a hillside, selected apparently because it was the most exposed to the weather. This field a humorist—and at that time we really believed it to be a joke—had labelled a "rest camp." Major Brodie, who was always tirelessly devoted to the interests of the men, sent a party into the town to buy additional provisions, which they did, adding woolly coats for themselves, and learning for the first time that a cardigan jacket

is indeed the beginning of all comfort in the Army. After some hours we moved out from Cromer and arrived at Mundesley, which was to be our home for the next four months. We appropriated the Grand Hotel as our headquarters. Everyone was still very much straining at the leash, but we were calmed by the belief that we should shortly be sent abroad, alternating with the conviction that the Germans would attempt a landing.

Those who had Christmas leave were recalled by telegram, and on the morning of December 25th the whole brigade stood to arms at dawn. The transport was moved some miles inland ; the led horses were collected and the troops themselves manned, on a wonderful, frosty morning, the shallow trenches along the edge of the Mundesley cliffs. Whether this was a real scare or merely a practice I cannot say, but I heard of one enthusiast who—taking it quite seriously and fearing casualties among the civilians—advised that all should move to the next inland town, which advice being taken by some infirm old ladies actually resulted in the fatalities which he had foreseen.

While we were waiting at Mundesley, I managed to obtain permission to attend a musketry course at the Bisley ranges. An efficient school had been set up, indeed it was one of the best efforts of its kind I came across in the Army. Several of the instructors were crack shots—though why they were only allowed to rank as sergeant-majors I never quite understood.

In view of the possibility of my going abroad as machine-gun officer, with a brigade that seemed more likely to start than ours, I extracted "local" permis-

sion to attend a machine-gun course also at Bisley, and incidentally visited the works at Birmingham, where Colonel Lewis was beginning to lay the foundations for the big output of his new gun. The working of the gun he explained to me himself, and I did two days' practice at "stripping" and "assembling," that is to say, taking the gun to pieces and putting it together again. This one soon learned to do with closed eyes. I also found, with great difficulty, where a Colt gun was to be handled, and in an upper floor in Cannon Street learned what I could of that rather heavy weapon. In addition to this, I attended a little class which Vickers provided for officers, at their works at Erith. They did not give any instruction in the tactical use of the gun, as it was purely a mechanical course, but it was none the less important, for, as everyone knows, "stripping" is the basis of all real handiness in machine-gun work. I remember best the lessons given by a naval ex-petty officer, who, I believe, was by way of being something of a politician and a member of the local authority. He was quite the cleverest instructor in the mechanism of the gun that I have ever heard and possessed a talent which combined clarity of exposition with a good deal of dramatic power. The training manual will explain the working of the recoil parts, for instance, as follows :

"The feed arm actuating stud is carried forward with the bolt forcing the feed arm to the right, during this movement the feed arm pawl passes over the projection on the rim of the magazine and engages behind it while the spring stud on the feed arm presses the right stop pawl, etc."

Our instructor, however, would enthrall a party of

young officers—by no means too attentive in the ordinary way—with a narrative somewhat as follows :

“ ‘ I’m off to the Front,’ says the stud, and pushes the feed arm aside. But the feed arm buttonholes the magazine and gives him a turn.

“ ‘ Oho,’ says the bolt-head, ‘ here’s a chance to catch a cartridge,’ and he drives him along till he’s safe in the chamber. ”

Who but would be thrilled by this sensational adventure ?

After Vickers I appeared at Bisley. Apparently no sanction had been given for my instruction, but a kindly and most able officer, finding someone really anxious to learn, was good enough to allow me to attend the lectures. The work was very hard. I doubt whether more could have been done in three weeks than was crowded into that course. The instructors were of the usual Army sergeant type. I remember when I was being asked to explain one particular action of the gun, and did so in a manner which was a little unorthodox, a pained expression came over the face of my teacher as he said, “ Yes, sir, that is undoubtedly so, but would it not be better if you were to say ‘ so and so ’ ? ”—reeling off verbatim the official book. This was the defect, of course, of that type of instructor and that type of instruction, and is characteristic of too much of Army training. How the naval petty officer from Erith would have made it live !

Our lecturer, however, was exceptionally gifted and interesting. The class consisted mostly of subalterns—one was Mr. Christopher Lowther, the Speaker’s son—but amongst us we had, I remember, a major.

Now, of course, this was not a commonwealth of intellect, but a military school where a major is a major. So that any questions asked by the major of the lecturer, who was merely a second lieutenant, had to be treated with the respect due on all occasions from second lieutenants to majors. I will only give one example. The lecturer was explaining how the gun could be fixed to cover a certain point by night, by the simple device of erecting by daylight two conspicuous objects giving the line. "One moment," said the Major—the class stood mentally to attention—"I suppose the two objects would have to be put in the same line!" "Yes, sir," was the reply. The intellectual "stand-at-ease" was sounded and the discourse was allowed to proceed.

When I returned to the regiment I found that, although I had passed the course with distinction (!), my unauthorised excursion had given rise to considerable difficulty in official quarters, and I think, on the whole, the episode, so far from assisting my career as a soldier, had produced a black mark in my military record.

A few weeks later came the thrilling news that the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force was being organised, and that we were to be allowed to form part of it. Everyone was in good heart, and great was our anxiety lest the troops should arrive at Constantinople and the War should be over before we could reach the spot. The flush of enthusiasm produced all sorts of bright ideas. To me it seemed the obvious thing to learn Turkish. Accordingly I accumulated some grammar books and dictionaries—with some misgiving, as they were of German origin!—and

secured also, at an enormous wage, the services of an Armenian, who was to come and live with us at Mundesley and hold classes all day long in the Turkish language. The officers of the regiment joined gaily in the scheme, but in a few weeks not many of us were left as serious students. Whether the Armenian knew any Turkish I cannot say, but I persevered in the studies, which were extremely interesting, as the language, being a blending of Arabic, Persian, and Mongol elements, combines the chief tongues of mankind. Later, when in Egypt, being anxious to continue, I dug out in a chemist's shop at Ismailia a Greek, a native of Maidos in the Dardanelles, who undertook to carry on my tuition. He could not speak English, so the lessons were given in French, and as I came rapidly to the conclusion that his Turkish was probably no better than his French, I soon discontinued the course. I may say the studies were pursued with much pleasure till the books went down in the *Ben-my-Chree*.

In April we left Mundesley, and left there, too, many well-wishers. Those were the days before the national sympathies had perforce become deadened by the horrors of war. The departure of friends wrung the heart and evoked little expressions of emotion unfamiliar to British reserve. We all cherish very dear recollections of those warm-hearted times.

A somewhat tedious journey took us all to Avonmouth, where we were to embark for, as we believed, the Dardanelles. We spent some days on the quayside, everyone very cheerful, very happy, and looking forward keenly to the voyage. At that time submarines were not a commonplace, and we were all put



keenly on the alert by the news which leaked out that the ship which immediately preceded ours, the *Wayfarer* by name, had been torpedoed just outside the Bristol Channel. Of the fate of the crew and the horses—for the ship was carrying a mounted regiment—no definite news was to hand.

Our brigade was divided between three vessels, the *Nile*, in which I sailed, the ship which took the "Roughriders" and some of the Staff, and the *Crispin*, jocularly rechristened the "*Crippen*" after a notorious figure of those days, which was converted into a horse-boat and took just enough officers and men to attend to the chargers and troop horses. Our stay at Avonmouth and our subsequent journey were uneventful enough, though to our excited minds, ready to receive impressions, everything seemed to foreshadow the realities of war. We sailed on a Thursday and lay for two days in the Bristol Channel with six or seven other transports. On the ensuing Sunday the officers commanding two destroyers came aboard and ordered us to be ready. We dined them—it was a high-spirited party—and then in the pitch dark our convoy moved off, a destroyer on each side, our men singing choruses, the other ships taking their turn too, and if a special favourite was desired asking for it by flash lamp. At nine all lights—even navigation lights—were extinguished, and we crept to sea. We turned in but I think few slept. We were living to the full. For us the War had begun at last.

Our ship's company was delightful, and among it I formed many of those "M.E.F." friendships which endured to the end of the War. The same Force

which started in the Dardanelles, took part in the Palestine campaign, and was engaged at Salonica, made up, as it were, a sort of large family party, and although I had no single acquaintance in it at the start, after the lapse of a few years it was impossible to go anywhere in the Eastern Mediterranean without coming across old friends.

Speculation was rife as to what was to be the destination of the brigade, but we heard little that was authentic. News was received of the early doings, particularly the naval attacks in the Dardanelles, where, I think, no landing had then taken place. Charles Lister of ours, having been a diplomat in Turkey, had been chosen for the Intelligence Staff of the Royal Naval Division. The "Roughriders," as their ship contained a number of officers who had to be landed at the Peninsula, had enjoyed a splendid spectacular view of one of the preliminary bombardments, and when we met them again in Egypt some were beginning to show traces of the "narrow shave" infection in conversation. From these and such sources we gathered what material we could to foster our darling hopes. These speculations were set at rest by the discovery that we were in fact bound for Sidi Bishr, a camp near Alexandria. As this was the base of many of the operations against the Peninsula, we were by no means disheartened and regarded it simply as a port of call, and our sojourn as preparatory to the Real Thing.

## CHAPTER III

### LIFE IN THE DESERT

AFTER a week or ten days' stay at Sidi Bishr the regiment was moved to Moascar, which in Arabic means "camp." This was the name for our pitch in the desert, a few miles from Ismailia, the central point of the Suez Canal. Our high hopes began to crumble as we settled down in the beginning of May in a camp in which we were to spend what to me were utterly unprofitable months till our departure for the Dardanelles. At first we were under canvas, and right on into June many of us were still living in single-fly bell tents.

Ismailia is the most successful effort which the constructors of the Suez Canal made in the way of town planning. Beautifully sited on the edge of the lake, it is intersected by the sweet water canal bordered with lovely gardens wherein is set the Palace built for the Empress Eugénie with the prodigality of which Ismail alone was capable. Here was the centre of the festivities when the Canal was opened.

For a time, therefore, it formed a pleasant resort, but its attraction could not last long, and we were then thrown back on our own resources. The day's work commenced very early, sometimes at half-past

four or five, with a parade. By eight o'clock the sun was up and we were home to breakfast. Thereafter there were "stables" and two waterings of the horses, but after stables those who were not told off for watering had little to do for the rest of the day. I soon made the discovery that the great heat had the power of sapping all energy, and I spent many weeks in a state of exhaustion, unable to do anything but what was absolutely needed. By this time the tents had been replaced by straw shacks, some supplied by the Government, but others the result of private enterprise among the officers. All of them were baptised with lordly names, "Manors" and "Halls" included. A little seed and water would bring up maize in a few days to provide a park or home farm. One of our squadron leaders was the real Sybarite of the camp. He kept his hair-wash in the ice-chest. It was he who, two years later, desperately holding a trench against hordes of Turks with but a handful of men, gave his life for the cause, winning the first V.C. for the regiment.

The C.O. did everything in his power to keep the regiment happy. Not the least successful of his efforts in this direction was the horse-swimming, which used to take place frequently on the border of the neighbouring Lake Timsah. The horses without saddles would be ridden down by the officers and men to a section where the lake was just a few score yards across, deep but not wide enough to give rise to difficulties. The squadron would then strip for bathing and the horses be marched in, keeping regular formation as nearly as they could. The sight of these centaurs emerging from the water, glistening

in the sun, was really a Parthenon frieze brought to life.

Travellers from the East who have merely passed through Port Said and hold the usual opinion about it will be amused to know that it was the longed-for holiday resort of regiments sweltering in the sun in the desert. Major Fletcher, one of our squadron leaders, had joined the French seaplane flight at Port Said as an observer, and it was during a visit to him that I made my first acquaintance with the use of aircraft in war and conceived the earnest desire to join the Air Force. Strictly against orders, I was permitted to make a flight round the environs of Port Said with the French pilot de Saisieux in his quaint, cranky little monoplane. It was on the occasion of this holiday that I received a cable to the effect that my younger brother, Oliver Benn, who had taken part in the early operations in Helles, was missing on June 4th. About the same time I was much saddened to hear of the death of young Gladstone, a most promising parliamentarian and a personal friend. He, like every other young man, had felt the impossibility of remaining at home, especially in Parliament, where he would be called upon to urge and later to compel others to go to the Front. Gladstone was not one who could bear an inward reproach of this kind for long, and though he was by no means cut out for a soldier, he went off gallantly, only to fall, as I learned, in his first action.

## CHAPTER IV

### FROM EGYPT TO GALLIPOLI

PERHAPS I may remind my readers of the outline of the story of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force. The Gallipoli Peninsula, lying along the western side of the Dardanelles, is the gate to Constantinople. To seize it, a landing had been made early in 1915 at the southern point, Helles, and the mountain Achi Baba had been assailed. That plan failing, Anzac was occupied in order to outflank the Turks on the west. Next came the landing still further north at Suvla on August 9th. From here it was intended to force a way across the Peninsula to Maidos in the Dardanelles and so cut off and capture Achi Baba and the Turks occupying it—facing Helles. Thus the whole of the gate would have been taken and Constantinople laid open to attack.

The only relief from the tedium of our camp at Ismailia, by far the duller spot I was in during the War, was the persistent rumour that we were soon to be moved to this theatre on which all our hopes were fixed. But month after month passed without news.

It was probably with the intention of including our brigade in the first Suvla landing that at the end of July the definite announcement was made that we

were forthwith to equip as infantry. Then began the most painful heart-burnings. To dismount a mounted regiment means reducing the establishment of officers and leaving at least a third of the men behind to look after the horses. Who was going to be left behind? Everyone suspected and hated his neighbour; no sort of intrigue seemed squalid if only it offered some hope to the conspirator of being included in the lucky list. And then, when all the agonising work of deciding who was to go had been completed, the order suddenly came that the brigade would not move at all. Misery deepened and gloom became general.

Suddenly, a few days later, a mass of infantry equipment was dumped in the camp; everyone was paraded and fitted with unfamiliar implements, entrenching tools and the like, and it was definitely announced that we were to go. The explanation, though we did not know it then, was that all reserves from everywhere had to be collected after the failure of August 9th to make a further attempt to break through at Suvla.

Our last parade in the hated desert at Moascar took place at 3 a.m. on August 13th; a weird roll call, the men in infantry marching order and loaded, in addition, with all sorts of bundles and packs. No moon, lanterns held up to read the names, here and there a shout for an absentee, a hum of talking and the electrical atmosphere of a mob tuned to one emotion. Then the sharp word of command and we were off.

We embarked at once at Alexandria, in the *Caledonia*, a North Atlantic passenger ship equipped against cold rather than heat. The following day

we were admitted through the boom into Lemnos harbour. Here at least we were at the "back of the front." Men were daily coming from and going to the war; there were hospital ships, things we had never before seen; and all round us was the parched and barren island of Mudros diapered with camps and military roads.

There were fog-banks of rumour. We had succeeded, we had been driven back, we were holding on to the beach by the skin of our teeth, we were already across to Midos. We had certain news that the transport preceding us had been sunk with only a few hundred saved.

On the second afternoon, i.e. August 17th, we were transhipped to the old *Doris*, where every inch of space was packed. It is literally true to say that there wasn't room to stretch. We were fed by the ship's officers from their own rations, and I at least slept under the stars deep and soberly. Very early we awoke to find ourselves slowly steaming up the west coast of the Peninsula. We were perfectly happy; everything for us made new; the old, silly, tedious ritual gone; inferior people in their proper inferior place; only one stick to measure by—"Are you good for a job of work?"; everyone your comrade; officers and men a band of brothers; all that had happened seemed ten thousand times right.

Just before dawn on August 18th we arrived at Suvla. Again a boom was opened and we brought up in a bay of exquisite beauty. Think of the most lovely part of the west coast of Scotland; make the sea perfectly calm, perfectly transparent and deep blue; imagine an ideal August day; add an invigorating



breeze, and you can picture our impression of the coast of Gallipoli. For the first time since we had left Egypt's oppressive heat we had now the physical ability to respond to the moral stimulus. There was the intense happiness of feeling that we must and could give our best to a cause supremely worth while.

It was only a matter of ten days since the first landing had been made at Suvla Bay, so that the arrangements for disembarking were of an elementary kind. There was a pier, but it was not completed, and the road from it up the hill hardly existed. The skyline, which was only faintly illuminated with the early glow of the dawn, was jewelled with bursts of artillery, and occasionally a shell would fall in the water near our ship. Our disembarkation was effected by means of big dumb barges covered with shell-proof hatches so as to protect the troops in their short passage from the transport. The ship kept as far as needful from the beach, which was well within reach of the Turkish guns.

When we landed we were planted in a position which gave some shelter from the artillery fire, but our men were enjoined to get to work at once and dig themselves in for the next night. This was not an easy job, for, with a small entrenching tool, working on ground which is little else but rock lightly covered with soil, it is hard to make a bank big enough to afford adequate protection. The men were on a slope shelving towards the beach, and we officers on the hillside about a hundred feet above them. With the help of my batman I dug a splendid hole behind a rock. Let me say in passing that I have always been singularly lucky in my batmen. This was a

hefty young Irishman with a character of touching simplicity and keenly anxious to serve. At holiday seasons he mellowed and his good qualities then became even more marked. I remember at our Christmas "jolly" he had been so moved by an Irish sentimental song that he had insisted on forcing his way unsteadily to the front to shake hands with the songster. Ever since then I had liked him and snatched him up the moment he became available as a servant. Our joint efforts produced a luxurious and well-protected villa residence on which we proudly carved in stone the name "Battle View." It rained, a glorious thing to desert dwellers. The noise and smell of it were delicious. Nor was it nothing on our thirsty pitch to catch sweet water for drinking and washing. "Battle View" had a roof which collected this good water, and was well sheltered from the east and south sun and wind.

The shelling was new to us. It went on more or less continuously, and we soon learned to distinguish "Whistling Rufus," "Asiatic Annie" (at Chanak), and the rifle and machine-gun fire. All day long the battle proceeds—a fine panorama from our villa. Shells seeking the transports, bursts of shrapnel over the inland Salt Lake, and "whistlers" aimed at the hidden horse-dugouts. Below us, protected by the ground, are the men, some having tea, some reading newspapers, many asleep. About halfway to the beach is a track in which backwards and forwards goes a chain of mules led by Indian soldiers with munitions for the front line. Occasionally we see a column of gaunt and incredibly dusty men streaming out of a gully, coming, we suppose, from

the trenches. Here and there a stretcher party is feeding the field dressing stations dotted over the countryside.

Everyone was affected in much the same way by the shells. When we had our earliest close experience of them, I think we all felt a sinking and listened very anxiously when the whistling came too near. But the depression, once the shell had exploded, was followed by a sharp rise in spirits, showing itself immediately in a desire for sheer bravado and continuously in an exhilaration when the guns were not shooting. This was our first day of war, and as if to crowd the picture, two aeroplanes came over—to be driven off by shrapnel—and a submarine attacked the boom in the bay.

At night I dreamt that the other villas in "Battle View" Street were still abuilding and that careless workmen were knocking all night long and dropping bundles of planks and occasionally letting a cistern fall from the roof.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LAST FIGHT AT SUVLA BAY

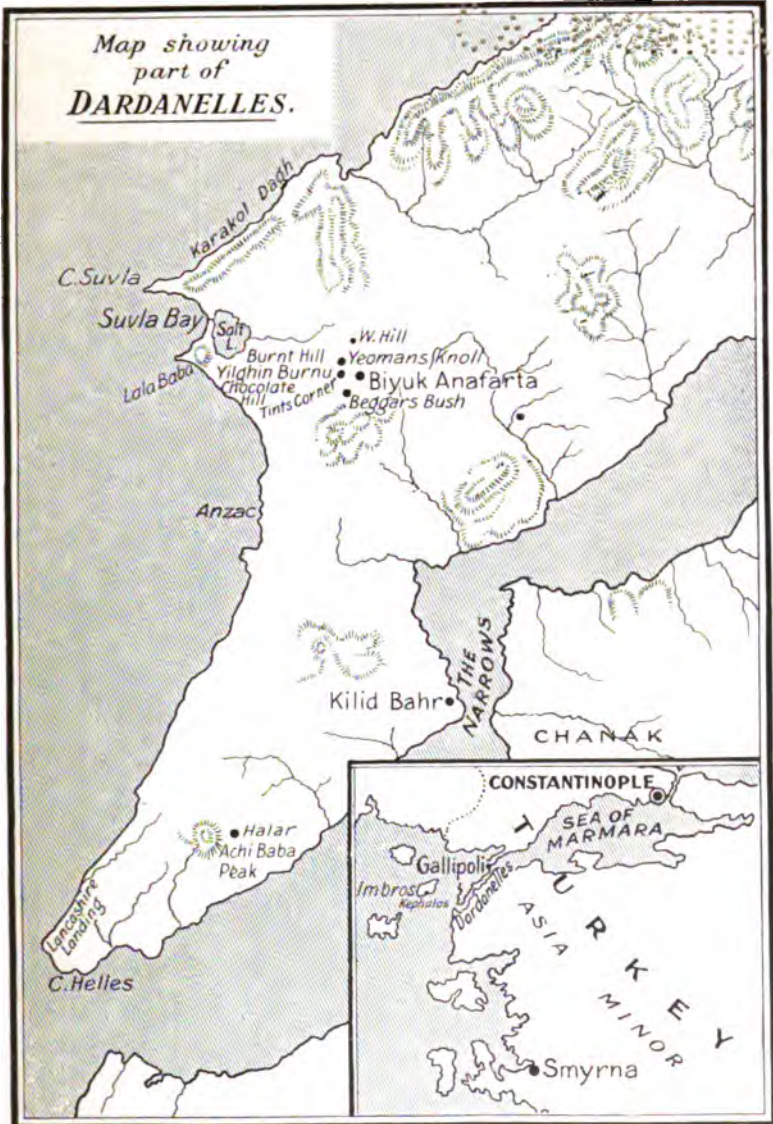
So passed August 18th and 19th. We were merely lookers on : quite ignorant of what we were to do or when it would fall to be done.

About tea-time on the 20th, however, the commanding officers of each regiment—and, of course, the regiments had been reduced to about 200 men, as so many horse-holders had been left behind—and the adjutants were called together in order that there might be explained to them the task in which we were to play a part the next day. I was adjutant for our regiment and attended this small conference, trying to follow on the map the scheme of things. We were, in short, to act as reserve in the attack to be launched on the morrow. This attack, it was hoped, would carry our forces successfully eastward across through Anafarta to Maidos on the Narrows. In this way the Turks in the southern extremity of the Peninsula opposite our troops at Helles would be cut off and forced to surrender, leaving us masters of the Dardanelles. I remember well that in our advance Chocolate Hill was to be the rallying point, but the "first objective" as explained was to be "W" Hill, known on the map as Ismail Oglu Tepe. It is about a quarter of the

way across the Peninsula. Alas ! no one has reached " W " Hill to this day.

We departed from the conference to prepare our troops for the move, and as soon as it was dark began to march down from the upper part of the ridge, Karakol Dag, where we were camped, to the beach, which we were to follow as far as Lala Baba, the jumping-off place for the attack. The march was made in confusion. First of all, as no mules were available for transport, the machine-guns had to be hand-carried, and their weight made it impossible for the section to keep up with the rest of the column. The only effect of trying the expedient of putting the machine-guns in the middle, was to break the column in two. The second difficulty was that other regiments marching along the same road were to branch off in a different direction from ours. In the inky darkness one could only follow the man faintly discerned in front, so, as may be imagined, there was confusion of regiments. However, infinitely slowly we struggled along a road bearing round the beach to the bluff or cliff called Lala Baba, the point closest to Chocolate Hill. Very different this from our last parade at Moascar. No laughing, no talking, all awed and silent marching in a never-ending file. When we halted we all lay flat for sheer rest's sake, so unused were we to the packs. Nothing was passed on the way except big Red Cross vans, each drawn by six mules toiling painfully through the meadows.

The ground at Lala Baba hid us from the guns on the Anafarta Hills, and as we were thoroughly tired out when we arrived, we scarcely scratched up a pro-



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tection on our allotted pitch before we sank down to rest for the night. Fortunately, it was the height of summer, and though the nights were not suffocatingly hot as they had been in Egypt, they were still warm enough to make it possible to sleep with comfort in the open.

The next morning we were at leisure, having nothing to do but to wait in reserve to assist when required in the advance which was being made forward from Chocolate Hill. The objective, as I have explained, was the capture of Anafarta and progress to the Narrows. No better spot could have been found than the raised ground at Lala Baba from which to witness the battle, for the Salt Lake and the rest of the intervening terrain is on sea level, and we could see for miles to the hills against which the attack was being launched.

I need not describe it in detail. The pith of the matter is that one brigade mistook its direction, another was stopped by a bush fire, which we also were to encounter, and in consequence of these checks the 29th Division could not get through. These few words summarise a fierce conflict raging for several hours.

Meanwhile our men were standing equipped ready for their turn to go. In my troop we had been rather proud of a mouth-organ band which had produced some amazing orchestral effects at Moascar, and we had set our hearts on going into action on the first occasion to its music. Unfortunately, having to act as adjutant, I was unable to march with my men, but when the regiment was drawn up to take the lead as the first line of the reserve to sweep on



towards Chocolate Hill, I was delighted to hear the sound of the familiar mouth organ. The *chef d'orchestre* was a certain trooper who rejoiced in the name of "Gunboat Smith," and enjoyed no small reputation in the regiment by reason of the fact that he had acted as trainer to the famous boxer of that name. "Gunboat" accordingly struck up, and it was positively to the sound of music, as I can aver, that this troop of the Middlesex Hussars went for the first time into battle. Thus were facts moulded to match the ideal.

After about half-an-hour's progress we reached the enemy's shrapnel, through which, of course, we were bound to pass if we were to attain Chocolate Hill. As each line of the division advanced into the beaten zone, the shells did their part, being timed to burst just ahead of our march. Casualties began, but our orders were strict, and forbade us to stop for anyone. When men fell they had to be left for the stretcher parties which were following. As adjutant I was to and fro with Colonel "Scatters," who, though slightly injured in the foot, was marching in front of the line. Suddenly I saw with horror my troop hit by a shell and eight men go down. The rest were splendid. They simply continued to advance in the proper formation at a walk, and awaited the order, which did not come for another quarter-of-an-hour, before breaking into the double. Some men exhibited extraordinary calm. I remember one picked up a tortoise, surprised to see it running wild, and another, an N.C.O., observing a man drop his rations, bent and gathered them up for him, an act which just brought him in reach of a splinter which wounded him. Everyone was in-

## THE LAST FIGHT AT SUVLA BAY 27

tensely excited, but all were bravely self-controlled. Let me here insert Sir Ian Hamilton's most generous account of our first time in action.

"Whilst this fighting was in progress the 2nd Mounted Division moved out from Lala Baba in open formation to take up a position of readiness behind Yilghin Burnu. During this march they came under a remarkably steady and accurate artillery fire. The advance of these English Yeomen was a sight calculated to send a thrill of pride through anyone with a drop of English blood running in their veins. Such superb martial spectacles are rare in modern war. Ordinarily it should always be possible to bring up reserves under some sort of cover from shrapnel fire. Here, for a mile and a half, there was nothing to conceal a mouse, much less some of the most stalwart soldiers England has ever sent from her shores. Despite the critical events in other parts of the field, I could hardly take my glasses from the Yeomen; they moved like men marching on parade. Here and there a shell would take toll of a cluster; there they lay; there was no straggling; the others moved steadily on; not a man was there who hung back or hurried."

About five o'clock we reached Chocolate Hill, which gave shelter from the Turkish guns and behind which dressing stations had been pitched. It was here that one of our most gallant officers, Captain Bullivant, who was afterwards killed in Palestine, was first wounded. I smile at the old Harrovian's own account of the matter. "I was singing 'Forty Years On,'" said he, "and I had just got to the third verse when something hit me."

After a short rest behind Chocolate Hill we were ordered out around the right foot to do our best to take "W" Hill, which, as I have already stated, was supposed to be our first objective. Up to that moment I can remember nothing but wild excitement and supreme buoyancy as of one living in oxygen.

During the next advance we had no shell fire to meet, only rifle and machine-gun—a new experience for us, and one which inspired more fear than it really merited. We ran across the first field and jumped into a line of trenches—supports of our own, then out again and forward into the next trench, leaping in on top of the men of the division ahead of us, whose reserves we were. They nearly all, I recollect, shouted to us as we approached to take cover and get down, but almost always tried to wave us away from the particular part they themselves were occupying. The fact was they were packed tight, I should say one man to every fifteen inches. From here we got into a communication trench filled with men of the Irish Division whose gallant attempt earlier in the day had failed. We had to stand aside to let pass a pitiable, ghastly procession of maimed, most of whom had been half-stripped to have their wounds bound by their friends. The horror of that scene will bear no describing. Fearing the effect on the *morale* of our men if we stayed a moment longer, we decided to jump out of this trench altogether and run across the field in front to a small hill a little ahead of us. As far as we could see, it provided good cover, for there appeared to be a number of reserves lying there in perfect quiet and safety. Out we sprang with a

## THE LAST FIGHT AT SUVLA BAY 29

shout and ran forward to the selected spot, only to find that it was under brisk machine-gun fire. The reserves were quiet indeed—for they were dead! We lay down flat, and then crawled a little higher up the hill, hearing all the time the terrifying rattle of a Maxim which we, of course, thought was the cause of all the killing. We assured one another for our better comfort that it must be one of our own guns covering the advance, and this, in fact, turned out to be true. We saw nothing for it now but to get up and shift our position. For one thing, the bushes in front of us were alight and the fire was steadily advancing on to the corpses at our side. It was from this incident that the hill became known on the maps as "Burnt Hill." Having made up our minds, we rose, leaped over a low communication trench, across another field, and into the advance support trench we tumbled, despite the fact that it was already full. We were now behind the spot which came to be known later as "Yeomen's Knoll."

This part of the day was so full of excitement that it was almost impossible to keep a count of time, or to notice incidents; but three things I remember quite clearly. On Burnt Hill I was certain that the man lying next me was "Gunboat Smith," who had led off the march with the mouth organ. Suddenly I heard a deep groan, and saw my companion, shot clean through the head, roll over and expire. So convinced was I that it was "Gunboat Smith" that next day I reported him killed. And yet the fact was that he had never reached this point, having fallen out long before.

Two other men I recall. During all the time

we were lying on that hill, crouching under cover, one old man was calmly fetching stretchers, binding up wounds and handing out anodynes to the poor wretches lying round him, apparently quite unmoved by fear. My other memory is of an Irish sergeant, standing in the shallow trench when we passed the procession of mutilated men returning from the first attack. He was bending over a boy who was lying half-naked on the ground, looking the very colour of the earth itself, and as I passed I saw him whisper a few last words of comfort and give the lad a rough kiss—truly a sacred viaticum.

By the time we reached the Yeomen's Knoll it was getting dark, and we began to arrange our forces on the left and right to try to make up the line in order to hold it for the night. Orders were received that our Colonel was to take command of the whole of this portion of the front. We were all in a state of the greatest uncertainty, not knowing who was who, or where the enemy was to be found. I can illustrate this by the following incident. I went with the officer commanding the Roughriders, who were on our left, to inspect the trench and see whether it continued round the front of Burnt Hill and joined with anything on that side. As we walked we found that the trench gradually became shallower and shallower, until it was nothing but a slight depression in the ground. It contained two or three wounded men, moaning horribly. We passed to our left up the hill in the moonlight to reconnoitre the position, when suddenly shots rang out from a bush only ten yards from us. I felt uncommonly foolish myself, as I had had no weapon all day. However, we called up two men with

rifles, who wriggled forward and emptied a few charges into the bush, but we found no quarry.

Having consolidated the position, we sat for the next few hours in the trench, deepening it and improving it in various ways. Once, about half-past twelve, we feared an attack, and fixed bayonets ready to leap out and meet the oncoming Turks. It was strange how this definite offensive act of picking up a rifle and fixing a bayonet conveyed a feeling of real relief after hours of helpless defensive waiting. However, no Turks came, and we settled down again, refilling our water-bottles from a spring, and doing other such useful jobs. In fact, the place began to feel so safe that I wondered whether it would ever be possible to induce the men to leave it. So demoralising is it to get under cover that I always feel it unjust to blame young officers for exposing themselves unduly. Such conduct is an almost necessary antidote to the "Keep your head down, sir," and "Suicide Corner" sort of talk produced by months of toil and danger.

About half-past one, in reply to several requests that we might be permitted to go on, a young officer ran along the trench, shouting that the orders were to retire at once. I can remember how foolish I thought his conduct, for the effect on our troops, under fire for the first time and completely fatigued by ten hours of fighting, was of the worst. However, I had to carry the order to the regiment on our left, and gradually the whole of what remained of the brigade was withdrawn, and began to form up in a road some two or three hundred yards to the rear.

I was then sent back to inform whatever troops

I could find on our right that the brigade was moving. For me this was the most unpleasant hour I had had during the day. The moon seemed suddenly to be extinguished, and the rifle fire to redouble in vigour and the flashes all to become visible, though up to then I had hardly noticed them. I was suddenly convinced that the Turks now were actually coming on. I found the regiment on our right, and shouted out my instructions in much the same style as the officer I had been blaming. I was pulled together by the conduct of a very young person in charge, who rose from the trench and most strenuously damned me for giving orders direct to his men, adding that as they did not belong to our brigade he intended to ignore the orders and remain where he was. I shall always admire that exhibition of grit.

There is nothing more to tell of that night. We marched back across the Salt Lake to our camp, smart sniping killing a few, but under no shell fire of any kind. We climbed the field to the place from which we had started, the men lined up, orders were given to unload, ammunition was worked out of the magazines and left lying where it dropped, and at dawn the whole brigade fell into their "bivvies," and slept soundly where they fell.

After a day's rest, word arrived that we were to march back and occupy Chocolate Hill and the line before it. This manœuvre was carried out that night without any interference from the enemy, an experience which suggested to most of us that by a similar night march the earlier loss of life might have been avoided.

Chocolate Hill at this period was covered with low bushes, and having been temporarily occupied from

time to time in emergencies was in a dreadful condition of filth and disorder. However, the troops who were now sent to hold it soon made improvements. Bushes were cut down and the ground cleaned, and rows and rows of trenches and dug-outs were constructed. There was a daily shelling, and as these shells had to come over the top of the hill and the shrapnel fell on the reverse slope, the beaten zone was considerably extended, in fact it seemed as if the hill was being scraped. However, as the dug-outs became better constructed and the men more used to the job the casualties grew less and less numerous.

I remember one afternoon being in charge of a small fatigue party engaged in some digging work which had been ordered on the very top of the hill. We were not seasoned troops and were all, as can readily be imagined, very impressionable. The particular spot where we were digging was well exposed to fire and was being spasmodically shelled, indeed I think the enemy could actually see us. In a bush alongside us was a man, apparently asleep, covered with his overcoat. I took no notice of it at first, but as we went on and on with our work in relays of picks and shovels, the picks under cover while the shovels worked, and *vice versa*, I noticed small parties of men arriving at and departing from the bush. When I saw the number of sleeping men grow from one to four or five, I understood with a sickening feeling what was actually afoot and what we were really digging for.

The spirit of the men, however, was unquenched. They were really merry. The difficulty was to check their desire to take risks. We were all happy. I

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suppose it was largely the reaction from occasional frights. The enemy guns, of course, had pet names, and their shelling excited admiration or derision according to its deserts. I can picture now a shell falling in a dug-out which was occupied by three men, all of whom seemed doomed to destruction. When the dust had blown away and they emerged, waving a shovel to indicate in the language of the butts "outer," Homeric cheers and laughter shook the hill. The experience of these weeks showed the noblest side of human nature, everyone putting forth his best in unselfishness and eagerness to help others. As to resentment against the enemy, that sense of hatred which is supposed to produce good fighting, there was none of it here. The shells and the bullets might have been earthquakes or tidal waves for the amount of personal rancour which they inspired in the breasts of those whom they sought to destroy. Besides, we were busy with some thrilling handicap races of country-bred tortoises.

Before I leave my account of August 21st and the ensuing weeks on Chocolate Hill, let me refer to the wonderful courage displayed by Captain Watson, who was in command of the squadron to which I belonged. I wish my pen could describe his sweet, unassuming character. He was easily the most beloved man in the regiment, but until we actually went into action no one could have conceived the unflinching devotion to duty of which he was capable. He led the squadron when we went forward from Chocolate Hill, and for a long time with a small body of men was missing when we were consolidating our position at Yeomen's Knoll. We all feared we had

## THE LAST FIGHT AT SUVLA BAY 35

lost him, and unspeakable was our delight when he turned up at night with the few companions with whom he had been reconnoitring the trenches on our right. Despite the heavy fire all that night he was to and fro encouraging the living, comforting and succouring the many dying.

I could give many instances of Captain Watson's courage. The very first evening we arrived in a new section of trenches our enthusiastic but very inexperienced men had improvised a listening patrol, going over the top and crawling through the high grass as near as they could get to the Turkish line with the view of bringing back information of what was going on. They were amateurs at the game. After about an hour one terrified fellow returned, explaining that the shots we had heard had been directed against them and that his companions were lying, he thought killed, somewhere out in the field ; but he was quite too scared to give us any account of the direction. Further action at the moment was forbidden by the C.O., but about an hour later, going along the trench, I perceived Captain Watson slipping over the top unobserved, as he thought. For half-an-hour I waited in the greatest anxiety for his reappearance. To my intense relief, he came back safely, having ascertained at the risk of his life that nothing more could be done for the ill-fated patrol.

When we returned to Egypt, tired of inaction and determined to see fighting service, he volunteered for the Infantry and won the D.S.O. in an action in which he was maimed. He persisted, however, in remaining at the front, and gained the V.C. in circumstances described as follows by the *Gazette*.

“The late Lt.-Col. O. C. Watson, D.S.O., of K.O.Y.L.I., who displayed the most conspicuous gallantry, self-sacrificing devotion to duty, and exceptionally gallant leading during a period when the enemy were continually attacking and trying to pierce our lines. The position was under constant rifle and machine-gun fire. Lt.-Col. Watson led the remaining small reserve to the attack and organised bombing parties, he leading the attacks under intense fire. Being outnumbered he finally ordered a retirement, remaining himself to cover, facing almost certain death. The assault that Lt.-Col. Watson led saved the line. Lt.-Col. Watson was killed while covering the withdrawal.”

His was the second V.C. in our regiment.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BOREDOM OF THE DARDANELLES

AFTER a few weeks at Chocolate Hill we were moved into trenches, first at "Tints Corner" and then farther south to what was called "Beggar's Bush." Impressions which were deep at the beginning began to fade with use, and after a while, except for occasional excitements, frank boredom supervened.

Living as I did for months in trenches, for there was no ground naturally sheltered from fire, I was often struck by the contrast between two quite separate worlds. There was the wonderful natural world of this beautiful peninsula, in the height of its summer glory ; the valley, the low hills, the sea, and beyond, the islands and mountains. Perfectly distinct from this was the underground cosmos of traverses and dug-outs in which we dwelt.

At night there is an incredible fairy transmutation. Then we live on the top of a castle whose parapets and embrasures are convincingly simulated in the silver light by the sharp-cut winding trench with the sandbags lining its lips. Inside is blackness ; not a glimmer is permitted ; outside a bright flow of moonlight in which there is no foreground, but in the distance the hills, and far away the flaming green cross

on the hospital ship in the bay, like a Constantine's "in hoc signo" to promise victory. Everything is seen just as you might look down on the misty countryside from your high tower. As you walk round on watch, twisting and turning corners at every few yards, you must step over the forms of men sleeping in all postures, wrapped in their cloaks, fully equipped, and each having by his side his rifle and gleaming bayonet. None move, not even if you plant your sole firmly on them; it is as if you are a Prince entering the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty, or perhaps the Mariner in the fairy story tiptoeing over the corpses on the "Flying Dutchman."

One night we send out a digging party to make a new advanced trench. There is no cover for them, they are just to go out and "get down to it" in full view of the enemy. I have been listening to the bursts of rifle fire which break out in the line from time to time, and watching the star shells, when a sudden scuffling near by warns me of someone approaching. It is one of the digging fatigue who wishes me to call the doctor to help a boy of my own troop who is half walking, half being carried round the zigzags of the trench. The Turks, it appears, have seen our party, and in all six men have been hit, two fatally. One of these is already buried, but at dawn—for I would not disturb the sleepers before—I get together a small party of three for the poor sapper who is the second casualty and is laid out in a little lane near by. First I have to search him for letters or identification marks, and then we dig a little hole behind our trench and cover him up. The hole is shallow enough, for the work must be done quickly as the Turks are

sniping. When we have finished, the enemy with a volley do the office of firing party over the grave of our comrade.

In half-an-hour the sun is up, the countryside, flooded with beauty, has come back into existence, the birds are singing, the wild flowers peeping over the sandbags, and the real world seems to have passed out of its eclipse by that other world of shadow and terror.

September was a quiet month with us. There was a small daily loss from shell and rifle fire, but the men were much better accustomed to their conditions, knowing how to take very quickly the right sort of cover. Two Scottish brigades were our neighbours, and formed part, I fancy, of our division. The one was Lovat's Scouts and the other the Scottish Horse, under the command of Lord Tullibardine. With the energy which all who know him would expect, Lord Tullibardine had erected headquarters which were the marvel of the countryside, spacious and comfortable; and great was the fame of his hospitality. On this account we were the more determined, when we persuaded him to dine with us, to provide a meal of variety and distinction. Our dining-room was hewn out of the soft clay and was a well-designed apartment, not without architectural features, cut by the practised picks of the miners in the Derbyshire Yeomanry. Moreover, it communicated with the kitchen by means of a buttery hatch in the wall, a feature without its fellow on the whole Peninsula. Our dinner ran into seven courses, commencing with tomatoes which grew wild in the fields and terminating with blackberries from the neighbouring bushes. The

*pièce de resistance* was a jam tart, with flour produced from crushed biscuits, and the *coup de grâce* a large thistle worked in the design of the pastry. Soubise could hardly have bettered that.

We were somewhat troubled by an enterprising Turkish post which had been pushed out to a point unpleasantly near. It was by this post, known familiarly as "Percy," that our digging party was so badly used. The Turks in the general trench from time to time sent grenades over and fired their Maxim gun, but "Percy" ranked as the official opposition. The two Scottish Brigades, which showed a mutual friendly rivalry, relieved one another turn and turn about at this spot. The Scottish Horse had been in the trench for some time, but "Percy" was still going strong when Lovat's Scouts took over. By a very spirited attack at night they settled poor "Percy," killing fourteen of him and taking two others prisoners, and joined the redoubt to our line, in order, by its means, to harass the enemy as they had been wont to harass us. The Scottish Horse determined to outdo this success, and immediately their turn came organised fierce and successful reprisals against the poor Turk, who thus got most undeservedly a double dose of vengeance.

Our growing boredom was temporarily relieved one day by the fall of an aeroplane which descended from a great height into the Salt Lake behind Chocolate Hill in full view of the Turkish gunners on the Anafarta Ridge. The aviators escaped at once, but the Turks solemnly took on the job of destroying the huge helpless object sprawling in the mud. Seventy-five shells were spent on it, but by night our

## BOREDOM OF THE DARDANELLES 41

men came and took out the engine and bore it away uninjured.

Gradually we became reconciled to the dismal conviction that active service was over on the Peninsula. Moreover, the conditions in which we were living were having their effect on the health and spirits of the men. Dysentery was becoming common, and hundreds were being evacuated every day from the beach at Lala Baba. Jaundice too had appeared, due, no doubt, to intense fatigue and the complete breakdown, in consequence, of digestion. When we arrived on the Peninsula in August it was generally remarked that we were free at least from one of the plagues of Egypt, the flies, but by the end of September the pest had become so great that food could only be eaten with one hand. The other was required for defence. Myriads of beautiful large bronze-green creatures settled on everything, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that if a piece of meat was uncovered to be cut there was scarcely room for the knife edge, so many were the flies that instantly settled on it.

Our spirits were not improved by the sort of rumours which were prolific in the trenches, the real centre of information being not the hub of the circle, but the perimeter. To hear that Bulgaria had come in against us was depressing, and we were daily expecting to see half a million Bulgars swarming down the hill to drive us off the beach.

Some attempt was made at propaganda against the Turk, and a reasoned screed was pushed over to him. A few days afterwards papers were observed fixed on a tree, evidently for us to fetch, and being secured



were found to be a polished and well-turned manifesto, evidently concocted by some German at Constantinople, warning us that unless we abandoned our foolish enterprise we should soon find ourselves thrust by German bayonets into the sea. The talented essayist hardly produced the result he no doubt desired. Incidents of this kind excited interest and with interest hope.

The news received about this time of the recall of Sir Ian Hamilton did nothing, needless to say, to raise our spirits. We regretted the loss of a chief who had, on all occasions, loyally and generously appreciated the efforts made by the forces under his command.

As I had begun to fall a victim to jaundice and slightly to other prevalent diseases, and as nothing was likely to be done in our part of the world, I welcomed the opportunity to go over to Imbros and see something of the island. With this end in view, my friend Captain Gubbins and I left the camp at half-past four one morning, and by tea-time—so slowly was everything accomplished—we had boarded the little trawler which plied between the Suvla beach and Kephalos, and were making a windy, wet, refreshing journey. It was a wonderful sensation to be walking about *above* the ground and sleeping in a tent, a feeling of emancipation from the subterranean existence which we had been leading.

The next morning we secured from the peasants at Kephalos a couple of ponies and rode at walking pace the seven miles over the hills through the mountains to Panaghia, a delightful village visible for many miles and set in scenery a little like the

foothills of the Alps. The town, when we reached it, exceeded our expectations. The red-tiled houses bend to meet each other across the cobbled street, which still finds room for a row of trees. There are two inns with newly-painted signs. One is the "Britannia," and the other, whose name I forget, gives equally a clarion call to British patriotism. Who could suspect the changeless fidelity of these peasants?

But the people of Panaghia are more fascinating even than its houses. Clarkson, in his most picturesque flight, could hardly beat these folk's best Sunday clothes. Slung jackets with fur capes, blue gaiters, dark bloomer knickers, sandals, and a sash giving perhaps a vivid splash of yellow, all produced a brigand effect of the first order. Gubbins and I "occupied" the inn, but the dining-room with its open front was practically a part of the street, and our bedroom, reached by an outside stair, was only a sort of retiring room in the common life of the village, from which it hardly shut one off. We spent but one night at Panaghia. The dinner was unforgettable. Partridge and omelette, the partridges small, but something not to be passed over lightly after nearly three months of mud life. The next day we were due back. The peasant brought our old ponies round to the hotel, and we left a street flooded with sunshine and a population deeply interested in every detail of our life and conversation, to make our way back to the port. It was a stormy night when we reached Kephalos, and we had to wait an hour or more for the packet which made the round journey of Suvla, Helles, and Imbros every day. She was a North Sea trawler of about 100 tons gallantly com-

manded by her fisherman skipper. The crew seemed to have a very hard life, for although they gave us a cup of tea, it was the most they could spare from their scanty rations. We headed up to a strong wind and rough water, the whole ship being swept by the sea, which threatened destruction to three chickens we had acquired at an exorbitant price from a Greek at Panaghia, and which were intended to provide untold luxuries for trench life on the Peninsula. We were so late in arriving at Suvla that it was impossible to land that night, and so we slept on the deck, planting ourselves over the engine-room, on steel plates which were warm enough to take the place of blankets on this bleak October night.

We got back the next morning to camp, stored the chickens—which was our main care—and were settling down again to the usual routine when we heard the glad tidings that after months of continuous service the whole division was to go back to Mudros to rest. At this time the Salonica expedition was being much spoken of, and we all most devoutly prayed that we might be given back our horses and sent there. “The plains of Hungary” was the watchword of the moment.

As my jaundice had got worse, I was ordered by the doctor to leave in the hospital ship *Valdivia*, which had been lying for some days off the beach at Suvla, waiting to fill up. I suppose everyone who is taken into hospital during a war feels grateful, but it seemed to me impossible that anyone should feel so grateful as I. The luxury was indescribable. The first hot bath for three months, food with no sand in it, free open air instead of the underground

cities which had begun to be damp and uncomfortable, beds and sheets, and food different from the tinned horrors which with us went by the name of delicacies.

I was determined, if possible, to get back to Egypt, for I had dreams of the division being soon reformed and active work being commenced. Reinforcement there would have to be, for we had come out to the Peninsula over 3,000 strong and returned well under 1,000.

The *Valdivia*, however, did not go to Egypt. We were bound for Malta in the first place, and when we arrived there the wonderful news spread that the whole ship's company, except one or two cases which it would be unsafe to keep longer on board, was to go to England. This, of course, would have upset all my plans. I had heard of some of our men who had been wounded in August going to England and getting appointed to the Reserve Regiment, which threatened to mean disappearance from the War. I was determined at all costs that this should not happen to me, but how was it to be avoided? The order was quite definite and the ship would be sailing before long. I had friends in the matron and sisters, in fact the bond between myself and the sister who attended to our ward was the discovery that she had canvassed against me in the last election. But the matron and sisters were not able to give any help. I therefore was driven to the doctor, and having dressed myself presented my case before him, and extracted a certificate to show that I was convalescent, as indeed I truly was. This being granted, I disputed the propriety of my being carried under the Geneva Conven-

tion, and finally my importunity prevailed and a felucca conveyed me to the shore.

The Governor of Malta at the time was Lord Methuen. Our ship had not been in the harbour half-an-hour before he was going round the wards making friends with the patients, and during the three weeks I was at Malta I had many opportunities of observing his tireless devotion to the interests of the sick and wounded.

In the harbour at this time was lying one of the early victims of the Mediterranean submarine attacks, the *Mercian*. She had suffered many casualties from a 4.7 gun. The trouble had arisen because someone, thinking the ship was being torpedoed, had paraded the men at boat stations, and instead of the torpedoes came shells. The shooting was good. One shell passed right through the captain's cabin on the bridge, nearly destroying the steering gear, and many fell among the crowded troops, inflicting much loss.

Malta was better than London, but I realised that the risks of remaining in a convalescent camp were grave. I dreaded finding myself appointed O.C. of the Laundry or dropping into some such P.B. job. I had cabled to my General twice, but no reply had been received, and I learned afterwards that he had never had my communications.

I am afraid I did not give much peace to the A.Q.M.G. and his sergeant-major at the Auberge de Castile. It was a ceaseless struggle to escape from the island, with the feeling all the time of being no more master of one's fate than is a potato in a sack. At last, however, I prevailed, and, in company with

an Australian padre, in a West Indian fruit ship, set out in great comfort for Port Said.

I was very anxious to get back to Egypt, for I imagined the army advancing, and suffered the anxiety which beset everyone in those days that the War might be terminated in his absence. However, I need have had no such anxiety. We were doomed to months of idleness so far as the army was concerned.

When I arrived at Port Said, therefore, my first thought was to report at once to my brigade. Whilst waiting a reply, I met Major Fletcher, the squadron leader who, as I have explained, had been engaged for some time as observer to the French flight of Nieuport monoplanes under the command of Lieutenant de L'Escaille. Major Fletcher proposed to me a three days' trip in a seaplane-carrier to the Palestine coast, with a view to seeing something of the work which was being done by the flight in mapping out the new railway the Turks were building at Beersheba across the frontier to Auja. I was very keen on going, but permission was refused. The air virus, however, had infected my mind, and this offer was the real beginning of my association with the squadron.

I found our brigade at Mena, near Cairo, where, as being temporary Divisional Headquarters, we occupied the lovely hotel under the shadow of the Great Pyramid. In the valley extending from our house for some miles in a gentle slope we were collecting and re-equipping the remnants of the 2nd Mounted Division. Many old friends met, many new friendships were made, and many experiences exchanged. For the first time we could talk of war.

We learned of the successful evacuation of the Peninsula, and in order that no unguarded reference to it should appear the following instruction was issued by the General Staff.

“It is of the greatest importance that enemy should receive no hint of method by which the successful withdrawal of troops from Anzac and Suvla was effected. No reference whatever should be allowed in the Press.

“With means at disposal of G.O.C., M.E.F., it is impossible for him to ensure that indiscreet references will not be made in private letters, and therefore the only sure means is to prevent the publication of any private letters or extracts from them in any newspapers. The most stringent precautions should be taken in Egypt to ensure this end.

“The G.O.C. wishes all ranks in the Cairo District Command to bear in mind that any indiscreet reference by them on this subject may do incalculable harm and he trusts to all concerned to do their utmost to suppress any tendencies to refer to the matter in public and to refrain themselves from repeating anything they know or hear of to others.”

It soon became evident to us that there was no hope of immediate Active Service. The Senussi campaign in the Western Desert could not absorb us, whilst in the East what mounted troops were needed were drawn from the numerous other cavalry units. Cairo itself was very gay, for all the Staffs were collecting there after the evacuation, and red tabs abounded.

It was clear that though this happy life afforded many opportunities of seeing the country—and of these I freely availed myself—it was no existence



OUR DUG-OUT AT CHOCOLATE HILL. ON RIGHT, MAJOR LAFONE,  
V.C., MIDDLESEX YEOMANRY. [Page 20.]



MIDDLESEX YEOMANRY LANDING AT SUVLA, AUG. 17, 1915.  
[Page 20.]





## BOREDOM OF THE DARDANELLES 49

for anyone who desired to serve in the War. My mind accordingly began to turn once more to the Air Service and my friends at Port Said. It was only with infinite difficulty that I struggled through the impeding formalities and at length found myself in a wooden hut on a little sand island in the harbour filling the position of military observer attached to the Royal Naval Air Service, East Indies and Egypt Seaplane Squadron.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MILITARY MACHINE

**DURING** my eighteen months' training in the desert and serving in the Dardanelles as well as at other times, I had much opportunity of studying the military machine in action.

As I propose to criticise the system, I should like to remark that I started with a neutral mind. The War was, indeed, my first experience of soldiering, but I had never been a pacifist nor in favour of reductions of armaments, and had even been associated in a modest civilian way with one of the Services, as Private Secretary to the First Lord of the Admiralty. I was and am, of course, a firm believer in the justice and necessity of the War. As a subaltern I had a good standpoint for observation, being in close touch with juniors and with the ranks while yet enjoying many opportunities of seeing the work of senior officers, with whose difficulties I was able to sympathise perhaps better than some of my young colleagues.

I particularly wish to say clearly that any criticisms which I may make must not be held to apply to those

with whom I was immediately associated. If anything could have blinded me to the grave defects of the system, it would have been the charming conduct of my own commanders and the comradeship of my brother officers. I was not unconscious indeed that as an M.P. I might be some slight cause of embarrassment to them. No doubt they felt, naturally enough, uncertainty as to how they stood towards subordinates who were soldier politicians, and I must say on this point that I had no sympathy with any attempt to play two rôles. In my opinion, it was necessary to choose whether to be a soldier, however humble and untrained, or a politician. The M.P. has many more legitimate opportunities of criticism than the soldier. The soldier has means of gaining information not open to the M.P.. It did not seem to me fair to attempt to reap the advantages of both positions, and I can say this much in self-defence, that throughout the War I abandoned completely my Parliamentary connection, considering that I was doing a better service for my constituents by confining my whole attention and energy to the performance of such minor military duties as were entrusted to me.

And now let me describe the military system as I saw it. First, what is it? What does it achieve and what does it not achieve?

The keystone of the military system is obedience. Not the spirit of obedience, but actual precise conformity. That is what is meant by "discipline," of which the soldier never ceases to hear. Now, if for the spirit that makes alive you substitute the letter, it follows that you must have a regulation for everything, for you cannot punish unless there is a breach of

regulation. The more urgently you insist on detailed obedience, the greater the demand for detailed regulations and the greater the determination of everyone to do nothing except in direct compliance with a rule. The more you insist on individual responsibility for obedience to every regulation, the more you tend to absorb all idea of responsibility in such obedience. The aim is to make a perfect machine, certain to operate amid destruction and confusion. Now we know that organisation is the breath of life to any machine. What can be amiss with a plan which appears to be intensive organisation at its best ?

Before I suggest any explanation, let us look at some of the forces of which the military system takes no account. Ready obedience is, no doubt, a useful thing, a very valuable force to have at command. But what of willingness ? Not mere compliance, but a spring of desire to do one's best, to devote the whole mind and soul and heart to the service of the cause ? What of ideals and visions ? Where do they find a place in the military system ? They are clearly not negligible. Imagination is the greatest of all practical forces. It has produced immeasurably greater direct physical results than steam or electricity. What place does militarism accord to it ?

The answer is that there is no place for these things. No place at all. Not that willingness is not welcomed. Of course it is. But it is the willingness to accept the imperfect or the bad at all times, the willingness to immure that peculiar living contribution which the individual alone can make, and to accept the age-worn decision of a recognised inferior. I know well

the military reply to this line of thought. "Would you have private judgment exercised perhaps at the very moment of crisis? How could you control vast bodies of men if everyone was a law unto himself? Have you never heard of the Balaclava charge?" With the greatest respect I suggest that such arguments miss the point. "Theirs not to reason why" is no more a model maxim of education than the charge itself was a model piece of tactics. Self-suppression and instant obedience must be given when needed, but is the brain a mere superfluity? There was once an automatic chess-player. Was his performance really the beginning and end of the game? I can only attribute the fear of initiative to the fear of its exercise at the wrong moment, but is that fear to crush it entirely?

Mark what follows from the point of view of organisation itself. Organisation in one aspect is a form of death. By the time you have discovered a suitable standard, the conditions have changed and the standard is obsolescent. None the less it must be maintained and enforced for the time. But that is only half the picture of successful organisation. The other half shows a constant fountain of new ideas, some good, many bad, all springing up and demanding to be considered, demanding to modify the accepted standard, clamant for recognition. That is the characteristic of a live enterprise. If the idea is not accepted by authority and its author persists, one of two things happens. The idea prevails and its parent succeeds to the authority he has subverted, or the idea fails and authority is vindicated, but in either case the better plan wins. In the Army that

cannot happen. If the superior officer sees nothing in a scheme, he simply suffocates it by an order.

Thus we get the one side of organisation without the other, the dying tissue without the new tissue. And of such a method, the growth of body—the most wonderful organisation of all—proves the futility.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SYSTEM AND THE RANKS

HAVING said so much about the general question, I propose now, if the patient reader can bear with me, to illustrate the points I have tried to make by showing how the system affects the pre-war class of material in the ranks, the better class, who came forward for the War, and lastly the officers themselves. And I would say in advance that so far as I could see the worst havoc was wrought, not on the subordinates, but on those who themselves wielded the power.

Let us consider first the case of the ranks. Before the War, for causes which I need not go into, the young man of the people who desired energetically to make his way seldom joined the Army. There were many exceptions, but the material generally was of an inferior class and the real task of the officers had been to eradicate defects, exact obedience, inculcate habits of personal hygiene and enforce routine discipline. Here the system undoubtedly succeeded, as it was well fitted to do. But these achievements, though excellent, are incidents in an ordinary life and not its main purpose. No business man would think of expecting his foreman to content



himself with seeing that the workpeople came to work clean, with their clothes brushed, and that they raised their hats as they passed the manager of the factory. Yet the greater part of the energy of the Army is devoted to securing this sort of result. And, moreover, my experience was that real things were sacrificed to these externals. Button polishing, the click of the heels, superficial neatness—good enough in themselves—were sometimes the veneer of stubborn resistance or listless inertia. What was really required for efficiency was not merely a mechanical performance of duties, but that each individual should harness his full self to the load and tug with all the energy at his command. To evoke such qualities needed sympathy and the power of appreciating the diversities of human character and capacity. These were lacking in a great measure.

What of the new Army material? It presented problems of handling for which the old Army officers were quite unprepared, and of dealing with which they were in fact incapable. Our brigade, for instance, consisted of three regiments of Yeomanry, drawn from middle class Londoners, bank clerks, architects' assistants, solicitors' clerks, young business men and the like. The whole-time services of these men were at the disposal of the Staff fortified with all the powers given them by military law and discipline. What could not a manufacturer or merchant have done with the free gift of the full time of a thousand picked young men—no wages, no balance sheet, no fixed hours, no trade union restrictions. I should be greatly surprised if he could not have made more of it than we did.

To illustrate my point, let me say that at one time I secured for the office of which I was in charge the help of a Balliol Exhibitioner, a linguist and historian, passed to me because the service could find no use for him, after several years of the complicated task of the War, except as a 3rd Class Air Mechanic, the lowest grade known in the Force.

I can say with assurance that there were enough brains and enthusiasm in our Yeomanry Brigade to produce an output in ideas and achievement undreamt of by the authorities. I do not think that we fell behind other units in our measure of success, in any Army sense; my complaint is against the system, that it discouraged initiative and energy and went to break the spirit of those who entered really with the earnest desire to put their heart and soul at the service of their profession. We did what is commonly called the "spit and polish." Of course we did. The disappointment was in learning that it is the maximum and not the minimum of attainment the Army permits.

Before turning to examine the effect of all this on the officers themselves, and especially on the senior officers, let us look at the means by which their authority is fortified. It is based on a real or supposed class distinction, to maintain or create which artificial segregation is the rigid rule. The officer, N.C.O. and private are all kept apart from each other, not only in the performance of their duties, which is natural, but also in times of leisure. Rules are made to prevent occasional meetings. Hotels and restaurants are rigidly put out of bounds to this end. I apologise

for reproducing textually an order issued on March 23rd, 1916 :

“ 1001. *Travelling on the Egyptian State Railways.*

“ N.C.O.'s and men travelling, or a Warrant Officer, must invariably travel in the class of carriage to which their ticket issued on the warrant entitles them. They are not allowed to pay the difference to enable them to travel in a superior class.

“ When proceeding on leave, N.C.O.'s and sergeants may travel 2nd class if they purchase 2nd class tickets. Corporals and privates must travel 3rd class in the carriages reserved for them.”

This notice impressed me very deeply, but after all it contains nothing exceptional. Every soldier will tell you that it is only the old rule carried out logically and effectively. And yet what a commentary it is on the system itself ; class prejudice determined to entrench itself. The War, of course, forced all classes into the commissioned rank, but now in peace an effort is being made to go back. This belief that one stock is born to command, another to obey is the real secret of the struggle to preserve commissions in all forces for the upper classes. The fort is not held by any open means ; there are no regulations to say that none but the privileged class is permitted to enter ; the existence of social barriers is denied ; but those who have been on the inside know perfectly well that the gate is strictly kept and that the inner ward is the insurmountable inertia against which the unfavoured candidate throws himself in vain.

In this connection I will venture to say a word about the salute. “ What,” I can hear a cry, “ is

the fellow going to attack the salute? Look at Bolshevik Russia, in which unhappy country the destruction of class distinctions and the abolition of the salute preceded all the present disasters." Be reassured, I pray you. I have nothing against the salute; on the contrary, I should make it universal; for the salute is a courtesy which should be respected and returned. The salute should be a sign of mutual regard. If it is not, its value is small indeed. Indeed one might say of compulsory respect what the famous man said of compulsory chapel: "I am afraid I see no difference between compulsory religion and no religion at all." Moreover, a smart salute may cover a multitude of sins. I have seen the man, slipshod and shifty in his work, who has secured and retained the favour of his superiors by a campaign of servile salutes.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SYSTEM AND THE OFFICER

Now I come to what to me was the most interesting feature of the system, namely, its destructive effect, from the point of view of thinking and action, on the seniors themselves. Let us first look at the relation of the old regular officer to his men. They made little claim on the imagination. They needed no sympathetic comprehension. Poor devils, many of them were compelled to join the Army as the only means of a livelihood open to them ; they made no suggestions, they desired nothing better than regular rations, clothing and quarters. The only organising to be done with them was to organise them out of their vices. This work, naturally enough, was handed over to the non-commissioned officers. The good Sergt.-Major was a stern, honest, and often a fatherly man, well qualified for the task which he had to perform. "I leave all that to the Sergt.-Major" was a common saying, and was regarded as a sign of ripe experience. But if the Sergt.-Major could do it all, what was the use of the officer ? Was anything really demanded of him ? And if nothing was demanded of him how could he become trained ?

Then came the War, bringing a new class into the ranks. "These men are too good ; you can never

make soldiers of them," is not an imaginary but an actual quotation. "I admit that the Australians are the finest fighting men we have seen, but you will never make them into soldiers," is another quotation of the same purport. These remarks meant that the material was of too high a quality, and small wonder, for the superior officers to manage. Ideas would bubble up, energy keep spurting out; rifle cleaning and the ordinary drills were not sufficient to absorb it. What was the Superior Officer to do? If only he had realised the truth, this was the opportunity for him to train himself. It is this wrestling with conflicting ideas, this friction of minds, that produces the strength and polish we call education. But the System steps in and robs him of these advantages. He cannot discuss ideas with the men and risk coming off second best if he is wrong. The System would never survive such happenings. What chance has a man in such a walk of life to "better himself" in leadership?

Supposing that the young officer, though deprived of the free intercourse with the world which generates ideas, yet conceives some wise or helpful development and pushes it. Will it assist his career? Is there not even a danger that it may be an handicap? This absence of incentive is a serious thing. It leads the individual to say, "Here is my job, I will just do my little bit and if nothing comes of it that is not my fault." Now, it is of the highest importance that everyone should do his little bit, but it is also important that each one should fight as if on him alone hung the issue of the day.

As an example of listlessness, let us examine the

usual treatment of correspondence. Everybody knows that success in business depends on seeing that once a correspondence is started it is kept going until it is terminated to satisfaction. Now, so far as I was able to discover, no system of that kind existed in the Orderly Room. An application was made to somebody's office ; somebody did not reply ; obviously *he* was to blame and there the matter rested. We had done our bit. The idea that it was our duty to see that the correspondence eventuated in the way we desired never entered our mind.

I have seen men who really desired to get things done eating their hearts out. I remember one case well. A young officer, who had been a sanitary engineer in private life, joined the R.A.M.C. He was an Irish enthusiast, who interpreted his duties as a sanitary authority with all the gorgeous detail suggested by his rich imagination. It was not sufficient for him to do what he easily could have done, namely, make his routine inspection, see that the rigid minimum of hygienic safety was reached, and then spend the rest of his time at poker parties or polo. He perceived that apart from actual drainage his realm might include cooking and bathing, two branches of cognate effort meet for the exercise of his ingenuity. So he organised a great exhibition, solving in a trice such problems as appalled the old Israelites. Every one of his successes might be said to have consisted in making bricks without straw. A section of the desert was fenced off and inside it about ten or fifteen different exhibits were made ; soak-away beds, cleverly devised shower baths, field ovens, tubs for disinfection, boxes for keeping things hot, boxes for

## THE SYSTEM AND THE OFFICER 63

keeping things cold ; all these a little wood, tin, sand and chopped straw provided. I know, of course, that some of these things were later adopted for use, and I have no doubt they all engaged the attention of the proper departments, but my observation deeply impressed me with the prevailing spirit which was hostile to this display of initiative. It " did no good " to the man who made it—though he cared little for that—and I can still remember the curling lip if not the contemptuous remark with which his enthusiasm was wont to be talked of.

I have given simple cases of lack of initiative or resistance to it, but even more noticeable was the absence of any sense of real responsibility. By real responsibility I mean the feeling that the Commander's duty was to make the maximum contribution to the winning of the War, with the minimum expenditure of men's time and labour. I purposely leave out the consideration of casualties.

A business man would have been cross-examining himself continually to see what savings could be effected, what new arrangements made in reducing the weekly Wages Bill. But in the Army the Commanding Officer never sees the Wages Bill ; it is meekly paid by the sleeping partner. What was the use of labour-saving devices when all the labour of the formation was freely at his service ? The difficulty was not to get work done, but to find work to occupy the men. I remember a division moving into camp and the question arising of telephonic communication between the division and the individual regiments, of which, I think, there were twelve. The Divisional H.Q. communicated with the Camp Office. From



there, orderlies communicated with the Brigades and the Brigades similarly with the Regiments. All within the area of a mile and a half. The idea of a switch-board which would have put the divisional commander into touch with the regimental officer was rejected as a breach of what was laid down in the Communication Section of the Book. Similarly for the many daily returns. Although a general form was prescribed, each unit sent its reply with slight variations on a sheet of a special size ruled up at an aggregate expenditure of hours of labour by the Orderly Room clerks. The suggestion that a form should be duplicated and distributed for general use in the division—and it must be remembered the whole division was centred in a camp close at hand—was scouted, this being textually the reply: "If you issue such a form, what on earth will the Orderly Room clerks find to do?" There you have the thing in a nutshell. At a time when the utmost efforts were being made to procure more men this was the way in which they were being used. Is it a matter for surprise that the army training of some five million men has noticeably reduced the national power of work? Is it wrong for those who see that the greatest need of all is output to oppose a system so utterly destructive of production? And yet there are at the present day exponents of the theory, people who want to put everybody into uniform, who see nothing in maintaining the creative capacity of the nation, and who imagine that unless we are all doing the goose-step to prepare for the next war, which, if it ever comes, will probably be fought by means of bacilli, or perhaps viri, we are unpatriotic citizens.

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COMMANDER SAMSON AND CAPTAIN BENN WRECKED OFF JAFFA.

[Page 86.]

My final criticism of the effect of the Military System on the officer himself is to point out how it lowers the standard of general education, especially among the most senior.

In other walks of life it is difficult for a man to remain a fool without someone giving him a hint to that effect ; but not so in the Army ; and the senior officer who carries into the mess the atmosphere of command which is only proper to the parade ground is himself the chief sufferer. This I was forced often to observe. Fortunately, being a very subordinate person, I had no rôle assigned to me more difficult than that of the young lady in the play, whose part from the overture to the ring-down of the curtain is to say, " Yes, Mamma." I was privileged, therefore, to hear much and say little, and I discovered that there were a good many people in high command whose education would have done no credit to the senior forms of a grammar school. For instance, I remember a discussion in which the French Revolution and the Commune were spoken of as one and the same rising. I remember, too, the origin of the War and of the Prussian plotting for world-power explained, with some pride, by a senior officer who told me he had been reading a most interesting book and the whole thing started with an affair called the Hanseatic League. Mistrust and even contempt for higher education became bolder as it began to appear that the War would never cease and the Senior Officer would therefore reign for ever. My Balliol Exhibitioner was cited to show that study was a whimsical excess of no practical value compared with what was called " the power to handle men," which meant teaching them that they belonged to the

lower classes. One gem of conversation on the subject of research I must set down.

W.B. : " I happened to find out to-day, sir, what Captain Jones was before the War."

Senior : " Indeed ! "

W.B. : " Yes, sir. He was a Post-Graduate Research Student and lectured in Zoology. Lectured before the Eugenics Society. An interesting man."

Senior : " Ah ! Very interesting. Zoology ? Zoology ? Let me see, that is all about animals, isn't it ? (Pause.) You know, I often think that sort of thing is very interesting and all that, but—(with slight remonstrance)—what does it all lead to ? "

This sort of ignorance is inevitable if men live in narrow grooves and are forbidden by the rules of the game to receive any education from those who alone can educate them, namely, their subordinates, whose sole permitted relations, however, are those of mechanical respect, and whose sole licit verbal intercourse is to be found in the words : " Yes, sir," and " No, sir."

## CHAPTER X

### IS MILITARISM A SURE DEFENCE ?

I HAVE said that imagination has little place in the military machine. "And a good thing too," I can hear replied. "What can the emotions and whimsies of all sorts contribute to a system that demands instant, meticulous, if you like, wooden obedience?" But I think this view overlooks some essential points.

To ask for imagination is not necessarily to ask for long-haired poets in the ranks. There is technical imagination called science and invention. Is it to be excluded? An examination will prove that the same spirit which made our riding master pillory a famous horseman who happened to be a recruit, because he had "no idea how a soldier should ride," would have reproved Shrapnel and Wilbur Wright for wasting time with toys and probably punished Stephenson for mooning before a boiling kettle.

Before saying a word on mechanical warfare during the last four years, and the contribution of the military thereto, let us look at what offensive machinery was already in existence in 1914. There was the machine-gun. The machine-gun is estimated, I think, to be worth thirty rifles, so that this weapon was capable of solving a portion at least of the

recruiting problem. But what was the attitude of the authorities towards it? In passing I will mention a small experience of my own. I was sent by an over-enthusiastic Commanding Officer to interview an official at the War Office, with a request that Lewis guns might be substituted for the Colt guns with which the unit commanded by that officer was then armed. It is not necessary for me to say that the Lewis gun weighing twenty-six odd pounds was infinitely superior, for our purpose, to the Colt, weighing in the neighbourhood of forty pounds. Apart from this, the Colt "spares," which were as much a necessity to the gun as the ammunition itself, were made on the other side of the Atlantic. The official whom I interviewed might have been a magistrate and I might have been a pickpocket caught red-handed. I left his presence confused and ashamed, and so far as he was concerned I imagine the unit was left with Colt guns until the end of the War. Had I been a regular officer dependent on the goodwill of those above me for success in my career, that would certainly have been the last occasion on which I would have allowed myself to be involved in any display of initiative. That incident, however, was perhaps only a proper setback to over-zealousness. I will turn therefore to the attitude of mind of the regular cavalry officer towards the Gun-Section, which was part of the official establishment of a mounted regiment. He was utterly unsympathetic. Our allotment of guns at the time was two per regiment, and we had only just advanced a stage past the point when the machine-gun was carted about on a limbered wagon as if it had been a formidable piece of ordnance. The section was at

times frankly an embarrassment to those who arranged our mimic battles. One day, as a galloper, I was privileged to take part in the conference collected to decide the plan of assault on a ridge of hills held by a skeleton or "flagged" enemy. "You will make a frontal attack; you will work round to the left; you will hold yourself in reserve, and you," turning to the unhappy machine-gun commander, "oh! you had better exercise the section separately to-day." The poor enthusiast in charge was a pariah and his troop semi-outcasts. It almost became a formal threat against a man brought into the Orderly Room for some minor offence, "If you are caught at it again you will be sent to the Gun-Section." There was one exceptional senior officer who, at his own expense, had doubled the equipment of machine-guns for the unit under his command. And I remember the broad smile of satisfaction which greeted the order that surplus guns were to be handed in. And so we all turned again to our various recreations relieved from the disquieting suggestion that private zeal was to be permitted. Who could tell what it might lead to?

So much for the machine-guns. Another instance I will give is regimental transport. Napoleon said an army marched on its stomach, a dictum which seems obvious enough, but the said "stomach," or transport section, was the last thing the authorities appeared to consider or respect, and "You will be sent to the transport" was the alternative form of "You will be sent to the Gun-Section" as a threat to evil-doers.

Another example that occurs to me happened in the Air Service, but let me add that the epigrammatist



in this case was a transferred soldier and not a real airman. There was a suggestion that in photographing the damage done by our guns the observer who had been directing the fire should carry a hand camera with which he could snapshot his objective with ease and certainty. I have myself taken many hundreds of photographs in the Mediterranean in this way. The idea was rejected on the ground that our aerial cameras were usually fixed in the fuselage. They were so fixed because their work was mapping, a totally different job. But the argument was sufficient, and a suggestion which would have made the necessary operation far easier, safer, and cheaper, as any airman will allow, was rejected in these pregnant words, "You put the camera *where it is intended to go*." So the ossification was setting in so fast that a camera fitting which, after all, had only been in existence about a year had become already a mystery and adaptation or improvement a sacrilege. Exactly the same inert, visionless mind is reflected in the saying, marvellous to those who remember the great work done by the aerial camera, "Whatever future photography may have in the War, it has none in the Flying Corps."

So much for my own personal observation of the point of view of the old regular officers towards mechanics as an aid to warfare. They were looking backward, never forward. In the Yeomanry we heard of nothing but the *arme blanche* and "shock tactics"; important, I dare say, and in the desert warfare in which we were ultimately engaged, a very useful accomplishment, but compared with the machine-gun, for instance, what did they matter? In the

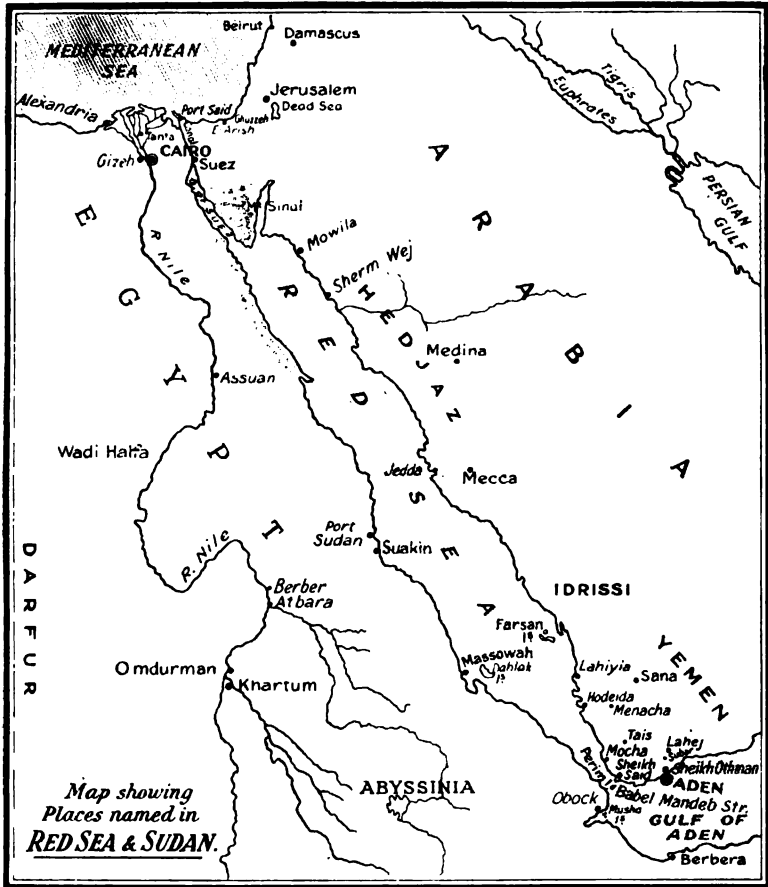
South African War, the Mounted Infantry formations had originated, I think ; at any rate it is true enough to say that prior to the Great War the Yeomanry were drilled as mounted infantry, called mounted infantry, and many of them had no swords at all. But so little had the real needs of the Great War been envisaged that we were actually re-equipped with swords in August, 1914. This change, I need not say, was hailed by us all with unqualified delight, and we dashed round the Berkshire Downs stabbing dummy figures with heads filled with straw, who, perhaps, if we had known it, did not represent exclusively the German Higher Command.

What was it, in short, that was really needed to win the War ? Surely the power of ready adaptation. To have thought ahead in peace time was valuable, very valuable indeed, as was proved by the wonderful organisation of the Expeditionary Force, but it was not sufficient. More important still was the power to adapt the material to the new needs as they made themselves manifest. This versatility was exactly what the Military System lacked. " You cannot train an army in war time " is a gem I treasured, given me by a regular cavalry officer. But except by war how are you to learn what training is needed ? " He is an excellent commander in times of peace " was the encomium offered from the Front Bench to a great General. Both sayings illustrate my point.

To test this question of receptivity and adaptability of mind, let us ask what was the attitude of the Navy and Army towards aviation ? Was this revolution in warfare initiated by them ? How long did it take the gunners to adopt aerial artillery observation ?

Did the Navy welcome it ? Who invented the silent Howitzer ? What was there in the text-books about trench warfare ? Who invented the Mortar ? What is the history of the incendiary bullet ? the gyrostatic stabiliser ? the listening apparatus ? to name a few aerial devices. I am not denying for a moment the great progress made during the War in these matters. But the War was run by the nation as a whole. Nor is it my concern to criticise very gallant gentlemen. I merely wish to show that the system is sterile.

Of the failure to tackle a new problem as such and the incurable habit of looking backward and excavating the old rules, no better example could be wished for than the Suvla fighting. The salient feature of this problem was the health and strength of the men. Health first, because strength depends on health. And yet the front line was greatly overmanned, as was proved by subsequent reductions ; unnecessary digging was constantly being ordered ; a time-table was made universal which gave quite inadequate rest ; each man cooked for himself ; and for a long time had to gather his own fuel and fetch his own water, from the permitted sources, few and distant, in the scanty period of his rest. Any suggestion put forward that we were lavishing our one great treasure, the energy and health of the men, was looked upon as indiscipline. Failure through inability to comply with the impracticable regulations of the staff was not met with a better thought-out scheme, but merely with more rigorous penalties. And yet to face the practical difficulties and overcome them is the function of the staff itself. What did appear when things were going badly



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was not a more workable plan, not sanitary companies, instead of casual fatigues, not troop kitchens, not better shelters and more water, but a scolding order about the failure in these shell-swept meadows to salute superior officers. Such defects are due to lack of imagination, and the breakdown at the critical moment occurs because adaptability, resource and self-reliance have all been neglected in military education.

The question becomes therefore, Can this system be mended? Under it could segregation disappear, could there be a free interchange and encouragement of thought, a subordination of trivial externals to realities? I believe not. Any suggestion of such a thing I always heard scouted. Indeed, discipline itself was founded on the great renunciation, the obliteration of personality, the acceptance of the creed of the ages, the vow to preserve it unprofaned. If I am right in supposing radical change impossible, there is no need to excuse those who believe that the safety of the country cannot be entrusted to the militarists. The science of war advanced between 1914 and 1918 as much as in the previous three centuries. Research can still make the pace, but research is the negation of militarism. The student is a pioneer; he is in revolt; he denies authority; he suffers from all the imaginative plethora for which discipline is the prescribed cathartic; and yet for the *matériel* of war it is on research we must rely.

But what also of public opinion? What of leadership? Wars nowadays are not conducted by irremovable monarchs employing replaceable mercenaries. Wars are peoples in arms. Leaders are needed,

military as well as political, who see the difference between a just and an unjust cause ; who understand how much ideals count as a practical force, even in the behaviour of individual soldiers ; who know that Right is the steam that drives the engine Might. Will militarism supply these essential munitions of war ? The answer must be "No." Thus we are enabled to define the real place of the Army in the scheme of our National Defence. It does not provide the science, it can teach but little of the art, it cannot control and can hardly understand the driving power. It is, in fact, the spear point only. For the thrust we must look elsewhere

## CHAPTER XI

### SEAPLANES IN THE EAST

THE East Indies and Egypt Seaplane Station to which I had now become attached was the most interesting sphere of work in which I found myself throughout the whole War. The station had come into being by the union of the Air Force which returned to Egypt in the *Ben-my-Chree* from the Dardanelles with the small flight of Nieuport monoplane seaplanes under French command which was working for the Intelligence Department at Port Said. Colonel L'Estrange Malone, who was in command, very soon succeeded with his great energy and ability in creating from these two elements a new living centre of seaplane effort.

I am speaking now of the year 1916, when the Turks had overrun the Sinai Peninsula, and the British front line was not advanced far east of the Suez Canal. The Army was pushing on along the old coast road by which Napoleon reached Syria and also steadily advancing, despite a reverse at Katia, across the desert. For aerial reconnaissance they had machines based on a camp halfway through the Canal.

Our work was different from that of the aeroplanes. A glance at the map will show that the Turk depended



for his communication with the north on a railway (from Aleppo to Beersheba) which was mostly open to attack by air from the sea. It seemed to us, therefore, though I do not know whether G.H.Q. shared our optimism, that we could render valuable assistance by watchful reconnaissance over this part of the country. That was one side of the squadron's work.

There was another. The patrolling of the Eastern Mediterranean was given over to the French Navy, so we understood—though on this and all such matters I speak with the very limited knowledge of general plans proper to a junior officer. However, there was the visible evidence of the presence of the *Jaurès Guibery* at Port Said. The old warship had taken part in the general bombardment of the Peninsula and bore honourable scars, including a posthumous wound inflicted on a portrait of the old Admiral Jaurès Guibery which hung in the Commander's state-room. The French flagship was supported at various times by other vessels, the *Jules Ferry* and the *Requin* which, lying in a hole specially dug in lake Timsah, formed a sort of land fort for the Suez Canal. As a Fleet the French Admiral, De Spitz, had whole flocks of armed trawlers and drifters including a score of very dirty Japanese fishing boats with great sheering bows which had been brought from the East for the anti-submarine campaign. Our second sphere of activity, therefore, was to work with this French Fleet against the submarine and to assist in their attempt to destroy the dhows, which sailing along the Syrian coast revictualled the Turkish Army in Sinai. With the French we also did a good deal of artillery observation.

Perhaps although this service of "spotting" is widely understood, I may be permitted to say a word about it for the benefit of those to whom it may not be familiar.

A gunner first aims at his target by some sort of calculation based either on a map or perhaps on direct vision. As soon as the ranging shots are fired, real observation commences. The old method was for one officer to watch from the forward post the fall of the shots and telephone corrections to the gun. It was thus that hits were secured.

A far better way, however, is aerial "spotting." The machine can fly vertically over the target and sees precisely the measure of error which the ground officer can only judge by inference. The pilot carries an air photograph on which lines are drawn round the target at certain distances. By watching where the shell falls on the ground and comparing this with the lines on the photograph the pilot can tell at once the extent in yards of the gunner's error. This information he reports to the battery by wireless telegraphy. It may be easily imagined that the "spotting" machine circling over is not popular with those who are being shelled, and the most active steps are taken to interfere with its operations.

A third part of our work was in the Red Sea. Here three wars were in progress. My readers will recollect that the great central province in Arabia on the Red Sea coast is the Hedjaz, containing Mecca, some sixty miles from its port of Jedda, and Medina, which is the terminus of the railway from the north which is the All-Mohammedan route for pilgrims to Mecca. In the year 1916 the Sherif of Mecca was conspiring to lay

the foundations of the present independent Kingdom of the Hedjaz.

Further south, also on the coast, was the broad territory under the influence of the Idrissi, a Mohammedan reformer equally anxious to get rid of the Turk, but not always able to hit it off with the Sherif. Indeed, the incompatibility of temper of these two insurgents was at times not a little embarrassing to us.

The last of the Red Sea outlets for our energy was the little war which was being carried on by the Turkish forces near Aden. The Turks at Lahej, in the hinterland, were really protected by heat, which rendered any military action impossible, but of this I shall have more to say when I describe our actual work in that quarter.

It is obvious that a small, though very ill-supplied squadron, with an ambitious Commander and enthusiastic subordinates occupying no very definite place in anyone's schemes and without acknowledged parentage, enjoyed amid conditions such as I have described unequalled opportunity for originality and initiative. I think I should add that neither the Navy nor the Army had anything like a true appreciation of what Air Power might achieve in the war against the Turks. The Turks had no navy and few aircraft. They were therefore unable to defend their coastline of thousands of miles, assailable at every point by seaplanes. Indeed, many, if not most, of their chief centres were open to attack which could not have been repulsed.

We had three seaplane carriers in the squadron. First a word about the *Ben-my-Chree*, the "Flagship." She was a new fast tripper recently built to do the

journey from Liverpool to the Isle of Man. As that passage was a short one, the bunker accommodation in the ship was of a scanty kind by no means fitting her to cruise about for days, especially as her consumption of coal was commensurate with her fine turn of speed. To adapt her to her new work, a certain number of the cabins had been converted into coal bunkers, and in addition when long trips were made, as, for example, down the Red Sea, the decks as well had to be piled with fuel. Add to this the fact that the forced draught blew the dust through the lids of the coal holes in the deck and it will be seen that except in port, when she was a shining model of beautiful cleanliness, our ship was apt to be somewhat grimy. Aft of the funnels there had been a large deck or hall, once used, I believe, as a tea pavilion, and it was this which was converted into the hangar in which five or six machines—folded, of course, and in case of the single seaters, with the tails taken off—could be stored. We carried Shorts (two-seaters) and Sopwiths. Aft of the hangar was the launching deck with bollards, derricks, and steam winch.

The ship's company was split up between the airmen and the seamen. It is surprising, although we were a naval unit, how distinct, even divisive, was the class-consciousness of these two groups; though nothing in the least disturbed the magnificent *esprit de corps* which made the old *Ben-my-Chree* an imperishable memory for those who ever had the privilege of sailing in her.

Two other seaplane carriers, the *Raven* and *Anne*, were attached to the squadron, but they were inconvenient to a degree, being nothing but captured

German prizes with little speed, great bulk, and no real accommodation. It seemed absurd to use thousands of tons of shipping to dawdle dangerously through the seas with a load of aeroplanes which could comfortably have been carried, so far as weight was concerned, in a steam pinnace. As a matter of fact, later, when the need for tonnage became pressing, they were reconverted to cargo ships.

The rest of the squadron was made up for a time of the French Nieuports which I have already mentioned. Even before the *Ben-my-Chree* came from the Dardanelles the Nieuports under Lieut. de L'Escaille and Major Fletcher had done a great deal of observing in Palestine and Syria, and their reports gave, I believe, the earliest intimation that the Turks were advancing their railway past Ramleh to Beersheba and finally across the Egyptian frontier itself. Beersheba was, of course, for a long time the great Turkish centre.

Of the *personnel* of the squadron I have only so far mentioned Colonel Malone. The pilots were all Naval Air Service men, and included that brilliant flyer Lieut. Bankes Price, who later, in sight of his ship, was killed in the air in an unequal duel with an enemy scout—what seaplane could fight a scout? Bankes Price could handle a Sopwith better than most men. On a day when the waves seemed too big for a machine to take off he would have himself lowered so as to reap advantage of the lee which was provided by the huge bulk of the *Ben-my-Chree*. But this involved flying at the ship in order to keep up wind, and this he would do, turning when hardly off the water just sufficiently to clear the decks and hangars. He was

a great favourite with all and his loss was a very severe one. Another of the real indomitables was Captain Clemson, who compensated for advancing age by a stern determination which nothing could daunt. He was the first of the pilots to fly to Damascus, accomplishing the difficult task, for a seaplane, of crossing mountains through low clouds. In the end Clemson made a forced landing at Adana and was sufficiently pugnacious in his bearing to force the Turks to shoot him through the body. He is now, I am glad to say, safely repatriated. Among the observers one of the most interesting was Percy Woodland, the famous jockey. Woodland had come out with the armoured cars, and had ridden a little in the races which were organised for country-bred ponies after the return of the Yeomanry from the Dardanelles. Subsequently he joined us and was a rich addition both as an officer and companion.

I have left to the last the name of Colonel Samson. In May, 1916, he took command of the squadron, and with him I did a great deal of flying. He was a Wing Commander who actually flew at the head of his wing and who invariably picked out the "stickiest" job for himself. Another of the same stamp was Major Vaucour, who whilst in temporary command of the 14th Wing did more flying than most of his pilots.

## CHAPTER XII

### EL ARISH AND JAFFA

AT Port Said we lived a peaceful life punctuated by excursions against the enemy. Our habitat was a portion of one of the sand islands which had been created by the dredging of the harbour. I believe we were never "recognised" by the Admiralty, but owed what *de facto* existence we enjoyed to the energetic colonising skill of Colonel Malone. We lived in the usual military huts and had our workshop, intelligence office, photographic department, hangars and slipways all within a camp of about an acre in extent.

I said we lived a peaceful life. Up to a point that was so. About April, 1916, however, the Germans sent a number of machines to the assistance of the Turks, and as they were still able to use the adjacent desert for an advanced landing ground attacks on Port Said were easy. An air raid, however, was no great matter; the real evil was that our seaplanes, when they went inland from the coast to spy out the enemy, were set about by aeroplanes, to fight which, of course, they were entirely unmatched. I think it was seaplanes from the *Anne* which first suffered, from two L.V.G.'s. A few days later the *Raven*, the German prize, was bombed off El Arish in a determined

way by aircraft, and as she only had, I think, an old 6-pounder, her defence was not a serious deterrent to the enemy. The pilot who was reconnoitring was attacked at the same time and only escaped by flying out to sea so far that the enemy, though he had an advantage of 25 knots and a much more manœuvrable machine, abandoned the chase.

For a naval action in an appropriate setting, it would be hard to design anything more complete than the bombardment of El Arish on May 18th, 1916. First as to the actual scenery. Cloudless weather and bright sunshine, of course; deep blue water stirred by a moderate breeze; the objective, forts just visible behind low sandhills and flanked by the thick palm grove in the Wady or dry river bed to the east of the town. Navy and Air were co-operating in the plan. For the actual bombardment there were two shallow draught monitors, deformed, disproportioned creatures with their one big gun each. Besides this, we had our four guns which we were burning to use. Last there was the *Espiègle*—surely the daintiest ship ever built. The smart clipper bow and overhang in the stern alone would make her a belle. But she has as well tall masts heavily raked aft and a great bowsprit with dolphin-striker so that she inherits some of the most beautiful features of the ancient race of ships. Round this fleet hovered the destroyer *Voltigeur* our gallant little ally chasing invisible, because non-existent, submarines. To draw the picture is really to tell the story of the battle. There was more setting than action. The monitors certainly fired, the *Espiègle*, gay with ensigns, closed the shore and delivered broadsides. Fired by the



pressed air-bottles were opened and the propeller started. Certainly the machine rode the surface splendidly, but when we tried to move, it became clear that we should have trouble. We could get a little rise of a foot or two, but before air-way was gained a wave would give the floats a heavy cuff. This brought us, of course, on to the surface again with a bump. Samson persevered again and again, but finally the waves thumped us so hard that both the light wood floats were burst. Then the natural thing happened. The buoyancy of the floats having gone, the centre of gravity was altered and the heavy engine pulled up the tail of the machine, which proceeded to stand on its head, looking like a huge obelisk emerging from the sea. The big wings, now on the waves, were sufficiently watertight to maintain the whole structure, so that so far from being alarmed we both burst into hearty laughter and climbed out on opposite sides, standing on the wings and attempting to salve our expensive belongings. We were not even wet. In the meantime, the ship, seeing the accident that had happened, worked round to approach us, but just as she was coming up, the planes became waterlogged and to our intense amazement and, I may add, disgust, the whole seaplane suddenly dived, leaving the commanding officer and me floundering in the water. A rope was thrown to Samson, which he wound round his arm and by which he was pulled, nearly with the loss of that member, up on the "rubbing streak," which formed a sort of little outside pathway round the ship. In the meantime, a good marksman had thrown a buoy which fell right over my head. The ship was then stopped

for fear the propeller should draw me down, and a motor-boat was launched, into which I scrambled. The motor-boat was in charge of a midshipman, Nicol, a Guernsey man, and as gallant a lad as ever stepped. His job in this very rough sea was to try to save the seaplane. Very soon the boat had drifted a long way from the *Ben-my-Chree*. Every time we approached the aircraft, which was completely waterlogged and showing only its tail, there was danger of us either being carried on to it, and getting stove in if we went bow on, or damaging our propeller if we backed on. Finally, I swam with a line, put it round the tail and in triumph we towed the salvage back to the mother ship. Now our work was over. The tackles from the davits were made fast into rings in the motor-boat and we enjoyed the Elijah-sensation of direct ascension, glad indeed to reach a paradise which contained dry clothes and breakfast.

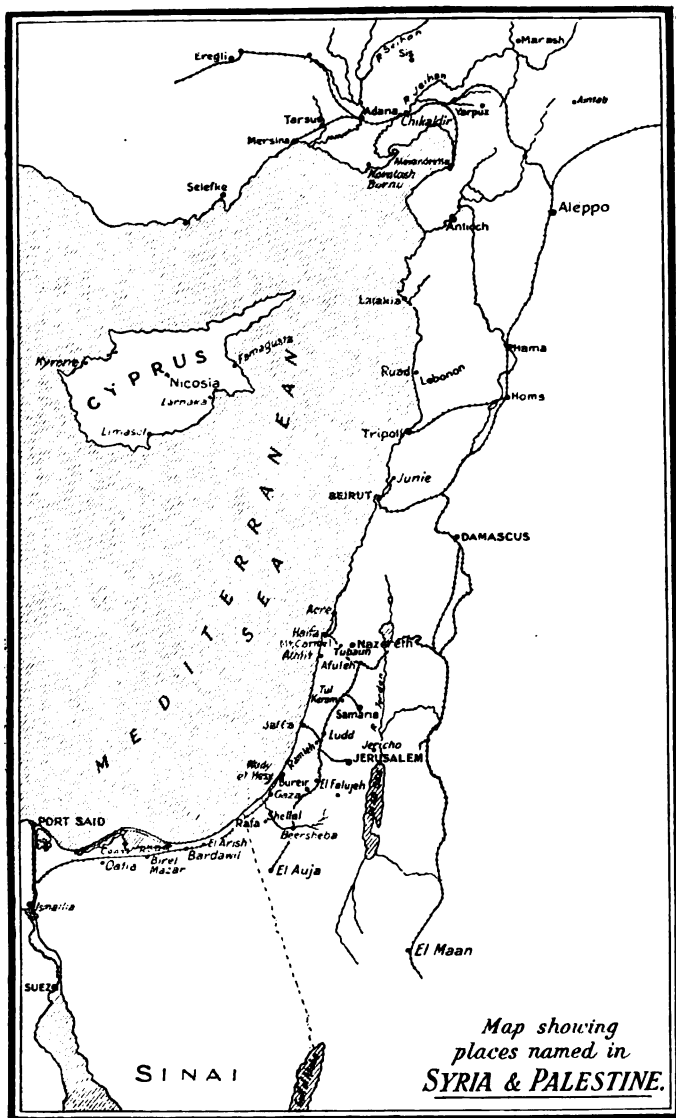
As the sea was too rough at Jaffa, we steamed to El Arish, which we bombed and also photographed to learn the result of the naval bombardment. While our plane was away doing its work an L.V.G. attacked the ship and straddled it with bombs. Observing that it had missed us, the machine descended to about 4,000 feet and attacked with machine-guns, but soon discovered that we were by no means a helpless *Anne* or *Raven*. On the contrary, we were provided, apart from our four 12-pounders, with a 3-pounder Archie, a pompom Archie, as well as an anti-aircraft Lewis gun. These drove away the L.V.G. and saved our returning seaplane, which could never have stood up to the German land machine.

## CHAPTER XIII

### JUNE FLYING IN THE ADEN HINTERLAND

VERY soon after his arrival Colonel Samson decided that a Red Sea expedition must be undertaken. It was evident that there was nobody in Egypt thinking out plans for the utilisation of the squadron, whereas the Staff in command at Aden had expressed themselves very grateful for the help that had been given in the past winter by the *Raven* and were only too anxious to secure the services of the *Ben-my-Chree*. Accordingly we sought and obtained the necessary permission, and although the month, which was June, was not exactly the fashionable season in this region, the ship duly left Port Said on the 2nd southward bound.

My readers are aware that there was not enough storage accommodation for the fuel required to keep us at sea for so long a journey. The engineers' cabins had, from the first, been converted into bunkers, but even this was insufficient, so for the Aden trip the decks were piled with coal. The condition of dirt that this involved can easily be imagined. The slightest breeze begrimed us, for the temperature kept everybody in a state of profuse sweat, day and night. The cabins were uninhabitable ; I remember that the



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soap in my cabin melted, despairing, I suppose, of being asked to perform its usual function. We all slept, of course, on the deck, although the rules as to no lights being shown were still in force.

Having passed the group of islands, one of which, we remembered grimly, was the spot selected by the German Emperor for a coaling station, we duly arrived at Perim on the night of June 6th.

I have already explained the position then existing in Arabia. In the Yemen, the southernmost province, it was somewhat as follows. The Turkish General Said Pasha had come south earlier in the War and attacked the Sultan of Lahej, who was our ally. Lahej is inland about twenty-five miles from Aden. The Sultan and his friends had sought refuge in Aden and left their territory to Said and his subordinate, Mahmed Soubhi Bey. When these commanders had established themselves they found that the rising to the north of them in the Hedjaz, to say nothing of the disturbances caused by the Idrissi, had cut them off from communication with home. They accordingly settled down to do what I imagine most of the Turkish troops were accustomed to do, namely, live on the country, and thus depended largely for supplies on the goodwill of the several neighbouring Sultans. The Arabs were not patient of the Turkish yoke, and would have been glad to throw it off if a suitable opportunity appeared to offer, which circumstance made it important for Said Pasha to keep up a strong show of authority. This he could do easily enough for the moment, for when the Sultan of Lahej had been driven out and summer had supervened, there were no enemies to trouble him. An attempted march

with raw troops had had bad effects. The heat, in fact, formed a barrier behind which Said Pasha was comfortably safe. This was reckoning without counting aircraft.

I may remark in passing that it was only by very slow degrees that the home authorities appeared to realise how many difficulties which had confronted us in previous wars in these remote parts could be overcome with ease, and what signal and decisive results could be obtained if only the possibilities of attack by air were fully exploited. I am speaking now, of course, of days when there were still those found who declared that the union of all aircraft under one Ministry was an imaginative mistake.

Having arrived at Perim in the night, the commanding officer decided that it would be better to take the Turks in the first instance by surprise. Instead, therefore, of steaming into Aden Harbour and making the routine preparations for flying, at dawn the next morning, while we were still at sea, a Short was hoisted out and got away to the Lahej Delta before, as we supposed, the Turks could know anything of our presence. This reconnaissance made it clear that the best objects for us to attack were camps which had been pitched in the cool of the gardens north of Lahej, that is, remote from Aden, and a large dump at a neighbouring village called Subar. Small defences of one kind and another were also found at all the villages between our lines and Lahej. The machine returned to Aden and was hoisted in when we arrived at our anchorage.

In flying in the torrid heat the main difficulty we had to encounter was the inadequate size of the

radiators. The radiator exists, of course, to cool the engine, and if the temperature of the air is very high, the water cannot be cooled as quickly as would otherwise be the case. Accordingly a larger radiator was really needed and on more than one occasion machines had to descend from the lack of it. This uncertainty as to the reliability of the engines was one of the main troubles, for the real danger we were facing was not the rather amateurish attempts of the Turks to drive us off, but the risk of making a forced landing in the impassable desert. So hot was it, that, although the air is supposed to be a cool place, and we flew attired in nothing but shorts and vests, men frequently returned streaming with sweat. Colonel Samson's plan was to terrorise the Turks by a continuous series of attacks, but it was impossible to fly throughout the day on account of the very disturbed state of the atmosphere in the heat and also because of the difficulty with the engines, which I have already mentioned. It was decided, therefore, that at five every morning and at five every evening we should make our visitations, and this plan was actually carried out for the best part of a week, which must have had a disturbing effect on the wretched Turks, for there was nothing whatever even in Lahej, which was a big town, that could have provided the least shelter against aeroplane bombs. The first morning, Samson, as usual, took the lead and I was his observer. We took a 112 lb. bomb on the rack in the under-carriage, and I carried a few 15 lb. bombs in the back seat; we flew extremely low, so low, in fact, that when we reached our objective it was impossible to drop the big bomb, for fear of results to ourselves.



The altimeter read 700 ft. above the sea level, which meant about 600 ft. above Lahej. A little height was gained, however, and the bomb went down on a gun redoubt, the rest of the bombs being distributed about the camp. Moreover, photographs were taken of this interesting town and of the Turkish dispositions about it.

The attacks so commenced continued with commendable regularity. We learned from numerous agents a good deal about what the gossip was in Lahej. There is a caravan which makes a tour of the neighbouring towns several times a week, its principal customers being at Aden and Lahej. The authorities at Aden did not interfere with this caravan, beyond making it resort to a special market and keeping it under supervision. I suppose they thought they learned more news in this way than the traders, even had they wished, could have taken back to the enemy. By some such means as this we found out that Said Pasha regarded our air attack as a preliminary to an advance by land, and therefore had impressed recruits, applied for reinforcements, and generally put himself in a state of defence ; moreover, he forbade the Arabs to desert to the country, but this order was without effect, as a general state of alarm prevailed. In the course of the numerous raids that were carried out, Subar camp was set on fire and a good many casualties were caused by the Turks' own shells, for, as I have said, the houses at Lahej and the mud hovels generally offered no protection to the soldiers. One unexpected result followed from their efforts to defend themselves ; an ingenious officer, no doubt a very progressive fellow, mounted a gun on the roof

of a house with the intention of improvising an " Archie "; the attempt to fire it, however, unfortunately caused it to fall through the roof and kill the men in charge. Said gave out that the object of all the attacks was merely to make him exhaust his ammunition and this was the reason he was not firing and the reason the seaplanes were not brought down. The aircraft, however, were occasionally hit by riflemen and machine-guns. Said attempted to stop the caravan which was coming into Aden and sent a messenger to his neighbour, the Abyan Sultan, asking him to stop caravans from his district also ; these orders, which were obviously from a man hard-pressed, produced, so the agents said, little effect, and one Sultan treated with contumely a demand that some of his men should be sent to dig trenches. It may be said, generally, therefore, that Said Pasha felt the pinch.

We came across several efforts on the part of the enemy to counter our advantage by craft or fraud. For instance, a wireless message was picked up in the Red Sea to the effect that " Aeroplanes had arrived." This was evidently intended to deceive us into the belief that we had to encounter the same sort of aerial opposition which we put up with in Port Said. Moreover, a very amusing proclamation was made by the Turks to the effect that they had devised a machine which, when operating, would cause the aircraft to stand still in the air. I would commend further research in this promising direction, in which Joshua excelled, to the attention of modern inventors.

The gunners at Aden occasionally lent us horses to ride, and it was by this means we were enabled to visit Sheikh Othman, which was within our lines but

on the far side of the harbour. Sheikh Othman, seen at twilight, with the cafés illuminated by torches, and on the topmost tower of the Sultan's great palace the outline of a watchman cutting into the glowing skyline, gave the impression of a fairy city.

Riding home we came up with travellers. Here truly, thought I, is the nadir of civilisation, half-naked Somalis, their wild glances set off by their barbaric frizzy hair, journeying across the trackless sands of Arabia on their "ships of the desert." The mind, already stirred by the parting view of Sheikh Othman, filled in without difficulty the whole of the picture of which this camel caravan was but the foreground. A sharp descent to earth—a sort of nose-dive of the imagination—followed their greeting. No deep obeisance nor quaint invocation of Allah. With cockney assurance we were asked whether we had been, as they had, to the last Earl's Court Exhibition.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE KING OF THE HEDJAZ—"MECCA ONE"

OUR work being over, we left Aden one evening and arrived off Perim the next morning at four o'clock. Opposite the island at Sheikh Said there is a little castle and a mountainous piece of country which had been fortified by the Turks in order to give trouble to the garrison of Perim. Here was an opportunity too good to be missed, and leave was secured from Aden to do our worst against the unsuspecting foe. We were accompanied by a ship of the Royal Indian Marine, a very welcome companion, well-equipped with everything required in a hot climate and affording a possibility of an invitation to lunch which was not likely to be refused. The poor old *Ben-my-Chree*, whatever her good qualities were, and they were many, had no ice and few fans, for in constructing the best ship for the extremely short journey from Liverpool to the Isle of Man, the designers had not been called upon to consider tropical weather.

Work first, however. At dawn a Short, fitted with wireless telegraphy, was sent to fly over Sheikh Said to see how the land lay. It was found that the fort, which some previous warship had attacked, had not

been reoccupied ; there was a park of ammunition, however, behind one of the mountains, and a camp or two ; batteries were also mounted on the hills. Such operations as we were about to undertake always gave unqualified pleasure to the seamen in the ship, for it was from them that the guns' crews were drawn. We had four 12-pounders, two forward and two aft, and nothing delighted our company so much as an opportunity of taking part in the war with a few rounds. The Short, therefore, wirelessly away gaily to the guns and probably on the whole better spotting was carried out than would have been possible with any of the ships with which we were accustomed to work, for our own wireless watch was more used to the operators we carried in the machines. The attack of the *Ben-my-Chree* was not allowed to go unnoticed by the Turks on shore, and they did their best with what guns they had. Their aim was bad and rendered more difficult by the constant movement of the ship. Some of their shrapnel fell on deck, one or two salvoes straddled the ship, but, generally speaking, their fire fell very short. In the meantime, the seaplanes were going and coming, bombing the enemy's positions. After about four hours, the battle was broken off. Our machines were hoisted in and we pursued our way, having thoroughly enjoyed, as one might say, a successful little war entirely to ourselves, for once unhampered by a General Staff.

Before returning to our base there was another piece of work to do in which we were all interested, namely, to join in assisting the Sherif of Mecca in his attempt to get rid of Turkish rule. At the time of which I am speaking, June, 1916, Jedda was still in



H.M. SEAPLANE CARRIER, "BEN-MY-CHREE."

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the hands of Enver's forces, and Jedda was, of course, the gateway to Mecca and commanded access from the sea to the whole province. The Sherif had had some military successes, but there was still a considerable force of Turks to be dealt with and, as I said, the Arabs attacking Jedda had not succeeded in taking the city. Evidence of the waning power of the Turks, however, was not wanting. One very tragic case came to our notice. Apparently there had been a small body of German agents, two or three in number, travelling in Arabia with the intention of stirring up the people. They found themselves about this time in Jedda and asked the Turkish Governor for a safe-conduct to enable them to resume their journey. This the Governor gave, but so little was its value that the agents, immediately they left the town, were set upon and murdered. Thinking that this pleasing act of brigandage would gain favour, Arabs came aboard one of our ships and offered the effects of the Germans to the British officers. Among these effects was an old-fashioned camera with some plates which were duly handed over to us, as we had the only photographic room in the fleet. We developed and printed the plates, which showed some wonderful views of towns in Arabia. Not the least interesting find was a visiting card given, presumably as an introduction, by Said Pasha, our friend at Lahej. There was also a picture of the ship in which the trip had been made up the Red Sea. We noticed that the flag of the vessel was in three horizontal bars, of what colours we could not know for certain, but they suggested the Dutch ensign. Among the effects there were also copies of letters which the agents had



written, apparently apologising for having seized a ship for hurried departure.

For a few days before we came the *Fox*, the *Dufferin* and the *Perth* had been lying in the roads conducting a bombardment of the Turkish trenches defending Jedda. Immediately on our arrival, which was in the forenoon, three machines, two Sopwiths and one Short, were hoisted out to make an attack and bomb certain objectives, which could not easily be reached by gunfire from the ships. The two Sopwiths dropped each a 65 lb. bomb, and Samson, taking the lead as usual, with me as his observer, flew at a few hundred feet up and down in front of the town, making some most interesting photographs showing the walls, the castle and the monument commonly called the Tomb of Eve. We went right down over the Turkish trenches, which we found were putting up a very vigorous reply, and Samson let go the 112 lb. bomb on top of them. From the explosion the machine had a nasty jar. The soldiers in the meantime made furious reprisals, and it was not surprising, considering how low we were, that the propeller was pierced, one elevator control wire severed and the woodwork under the pilot's seat shattered.

Everyone returned safely, highly delighted with the afternoon's work, and plans were eagerly formed for the morrow. Later in the evening, however, a signal came from the officer in command of the whole operation, on board the *Fox*, countermanding any further flights, as Jedda had surrendered to the Arabs. As he added "probably the seaplanes decided the matter," one may fairly claim the capture of this city, by no means an unimportant

event in the War, as a decisive result secured almost wholly by aircraft. We wished our work might have lasted longer and that we might have come in touch with the King of the Hedjaz—perhaps even visited Mecca by air. As it was, we got no nearer to his Majesty than by telephone, on which, with a commercial instinct worthy of Mr. Selfridge, he had had allotted to him the Number “Mecca One.”

## CHAPTER XV

### HOME VIA THE SUDAN

HAVING finished this special duty, the ship left at six o'clock next morning, June 17th, steaming for Port Sudan, where we arrived at four o'clock the same day. Here was an opportunity too good to be missed, although it was the height of summer. It was perhaps the only chance that would occur for years for me to see the Sudan, and accordingly I obtained leave from the Commanding Officer, made the necessary arrangements with the paymaster—a not unimportant matter—and wired to Cairo asking them to make my way smooth at Khartum.

Port Sudan is a model of what a town in that climate should be, with its wide streets with trees and stone-built houses. I think the dinner at the railway hotel came nearer to being enjoyable than any meal we had eaten since we left Port Said.

The next morning was Sunday, and though I went ashore very early and was protected by a helmet, the heat was most oppressive and almost sufficient to make walking impossible. The train was of the double-roofed, double-sided, white-painted, dining-coach type. I was not surprised to find that my travelling companion was a Greek merchant, for it

## HOME VIA THE SUDAN

would be hard to go anywhere in these parts without meeting a Greek, rich or poor.

The first part of the journey was hot and dusty. The contour of the country with its little hills is not unlike that of Monmouthshire. But further resemblance there is none. The train toils through a parched land where herds of camels, sheep and goats wander among small trees and scrub. We had occasional glimpses of native shelters. Naked children would run to the train and beg for food, and I was told, and just repeat it, that the natives live on the milk of their herds and occasional meal, and on tea and sugar, of which they buy a year's supply at a time at Suakin. As the line rose to Sinhab, the Hill Station, the air became much cooler and more pleasant, but the night, as we descended into the plain, was hot and very sandy, and life was anything but agreeable when we arrived at Atbara the next morning. The journey thereafter was through a flat, stony desert, with small granite hillocks, until at eight on the evening of the second day we arrived at Khartum.

I hoped in my brief visit to get in touch a little with the different departments of the Government, with a view to learning, as a beginner, something about this wonderful British Dominion.

When one comes from Egypt to Khartum one sees only half the Sudan, and that the bad half, though only eighty miles farther south are the rain-lands, and from there to the Equator the country is green, instead of being the parched wilderness it is to the north. The irrigation of the Gezireh, on which Khartum stands, will enormously increase the annual crops, but, of course, Egypt has the first call on the riches of the

Nile; indeed, it will be remembered that the conquest of the Sudan was undertaken partly in order to gain possession of the sources of the water supply of the Protectorate, which is the reason that the irrigation of the two countries is under unified control. I was given to understand that the increased resources for the Sudan would come from the Blue Nile, on which a new dam is being built, the new dam on the White Nile being intended solely for use in connection with the irrigation of Egypt. Further water supply, if required, will necessitate the draining of the Sud.

The problems of Government are not so widely different from ours even in these remote lands, for I learned that as railway extensions and general improvements progressed, particularly in the equatorial provinces, the housing question was becoming urgent and better dwellings for Government employees of lower grades were sorely needed.

I paid a visit to Omdurman, and having landed on the shore and ridden up past the Khalifa's prison, where Slatin was at one time confined, passed through the gates to the north end of the town. The population of Omdurman is now only about seventy thousand, but I was told that in the Khalifa's time it had been half-a-million. The roads are straight and white, and all the houses are of one storey. The place does not strike the imagination in the manner of great cities. As we rode round the streets and the market the impression produced was of sameness; no flowers, no colour, no variety; men and women dressed in black or in sombre hues; houses of mud; all seemed so different from the bright vividness of Cairo or even the coloured gaiety of the native attire in Aden. We

returned in time to breakfast with the Governor at the Mahdi's old palace, a house with wooden doors and fittings, not unlike an English farm, but, of course, utterly lacking in green and shade. An interesting feature of this palace is the large bath in the floor of one of the rooms, supplied from a tank heated by a furnace. This apparently was one of the Khalifa's luxuries, but it does not seem to have "caught on," and I believe showed at the time of the capture of the city no signs of use. The printing press, minting machinery and a quantity of old records are kept in an outhouse, as well as the remains of General Gordon's carriage.

On another afternoon I went over the wonderful Gordon College and met Dr. Chalmers, a great enthusiast, who proved, as enthusiasts usually do, extraordinarily interesting on his own subject. He discoursed on the effects of the endemic diseases on trade routes and the future of the Sudan, and pointed out the great advantage of investigating these tropical maladies in the country to which they really belong. One gained a glimmering realisation of the epic struggle which medicine is making against the almost impenetrable ignorance of the African races. Although the best skill of the West was there at the disposal of the people, I learned that it was only with the greatest difficulty that they could be brought to take advice and submit to treatment.

One sees a great deal at Khartum of the Egyptian Army which seems to provide constant opportunities for expedition and adventure. But nothing for a long time had equalled the Darfur "Show." Ali Dinar of Darfur had never effectively submitted to the Sudan

Government since the reconquest, and when he showed increased signs of disaffection, probably hoping to profit by our difficulties in the War, the opportunity was taken of punishing him. This familiar expedition was just concluded at the time of my visit, indeed in the Red Sea provinces I had met the train bringing back the Royal Flying Corps Squadron which had so effectively assailed Ali's forces. It is a study in contrasts to find the newest type of flying machine destroying naked spearmen and the news of the victory wirelessly in a few seconds from the eternal deserts of Ethiopia to the Eiffel Tower at Paris.

Another most interesting visit I paid was to the Research Farm, equipped with a laboratory, where diseases of agriculture are studied. Round the laboratory occupying some hundreds of acres are many small-holders under the tuition of the Research Department, which not only guides them in technical matters, but inculcates in their minds the idea of co-operation, so that to some extent it counts as a co-operative society. Mr. Sawyer, who was in charge, was another of these wonderful Sudan enthusiasts. He was anxious to see steam pumps on lighters moving up and down the river and taking the place of the sakiehs which, by laborious manual work, supply the fields with water. There is, of course, the fuel question in the Sudan (the plan for producing heat from the sun's rays for fire purposes having, so far, not succeeded !), but I was told that the difficulty is being overcome partly by wood from the south and partly by heavy oil from the big refineries at Suez. Mr. Sawyer was keen on a Government lead in

agriculture, and was very proud of his fine cotton and the praise it elicited from the Liverpool market. The qualities looked for in order of importance are length, strength and lustre.

Before leaving Khartum I had an opportunity of a talk with a political officer about native opinion. It seems we have friends who keep the Government well informed and a new "fiki" can hardly arise without news soon reaching headquarters. Good behaviour among the Sheikhs is rewarded by first, second and third class robes of honour and ceremonial swords, a scheme not essentially different from our own methods of marking fidelity to authority. In the Intelligence Office are preserved all the Khalifa's old accounts, medals struck by Gordon, and a thousand and one interesting relics.

I need not describe the journey from Khartum to Wadi Halfa. The wind was scorching, the cushions were hot and the metal-work in the train could not be touched; but, of course, these were quite familiar trials. This vast desert makes a frontier as impenetrable as mountains or seas between the Sudan and Egypt. At Halfa it was a pleasant change to go on board a ship and for the first time to find two-storey houses, coloured too, and a riverside boulevard with flowering trees.

Thenceforward the Nile passes through a desert with stone hills here and there, but as the river at this time of the year was very low we could see little beyond the palm trees which fringe the banks. The first night on the dahabeah was very oppressive. We stuck on a sand-bank about three o'clock in the morning and had to wait till dawn before we got off.



A small lighter or barge was made fast alongside us, to carry home some native soldiers, so that we were not without company. The men were playing cards, indulging in frolics, singing and roaring with laughter at their choruses like the big children's party that they were. We passed here a village, with the women on the bank dipping for water in their shining metal bowls ; soon we reached scenery more romantic, high cliffs on the east side and patches of deep green, while on the west the sand became a deep orange colour. It was a pleasant experience, this effortless passage down the river through a wonderful panorama of life.

The second night we were still on our way, but at three o'clock the next morning we arrived at Assouan, the terminus of the boat trip. After a little breakfast, we visited the dam. The Nile was low and we had a perfect view both of the great engineering triumph and also of the Temple of Philae, which is completely visible in the summer, whereas those who come in the winter see nothing but the tops of its columns. Thus were we repaid for bearing the great heat (it had been  $118^{\circ}$  in the shade), for to me this gem of art is the most attractive of all Egypt's monuments.

In the morning we set out by train for Cairo. So bad had been the tourist business in this part of the world, that the poor native vendors of souvenirs of every kind seized greedily at the chance of finding a customer and offered their wares for a song as the train moved out of the station.

## CHAPTER XVI

### PATROLLING THE SYRIAN AND ARABIAN COASTS

I WAS back in Port Said not many days after the ship, which had steamed direct home from Port Sudan when I had left her. Though more work was planned, fortunately I had missed no actual operations. We were, however, to go at once to a base at Ruad. Not the least pleasant feature of this Mediterranean holiday were our little visits to the bases which we used, on the Syrian and Asia Minor coasts. Of these the farthest west was Castelorizo, where ultimately our ship was lost. The second was Cyprus, where we more than once went to coal, and the third was the tiny island of which I am now about to speak, half-a-mile off the coast of Lebanon, called Ruad.

A sojourn at Ruad was very fascinating. The island is only a few hundred yards long and about as broad. It is so thickly populated and closely built over that there is hardly room even for a cemetery. The houses are crowded together in little narrow lanes, which here and there debouch on to a wharf or quay. There is an occasional glimpse of a bush or vine, but green is sadly lacking and there is only one tree in the whole domain.

The first beginnings of settlement were apparently made in the dark ages, for there is a fine Saracen

castle, well fortified, which stands in the centre of the place and dominates the whole. The wounds of many conflicts have scarred it since the time of the Crusades. From its high walls are visible the house roofs which in this overcrowded slum island form the promenade of the women. It was amusing when one of the machines was going up either for practice or reconnaissance to see these roofs covered with the curious and perplexed female population. The castle was also the viewpoint from which to see the enthralling spectacle of a sunset over the Lebanon mountains.

The government of the island was simple. A charming French officer, Lieut. Trabaud, was just Dictator. He settled civil and military questions with equal promptitude and justice, and even straightened out the tangled matrimonial affairs of the Mohammedans, necessarily complicated by the latitude permitted, though not enjoined, by the Prophet. Moreover, Monsieur Trabaud was no mean artist, and the villa from which he governed was full of water-colours of his own painting. In addition he had a collection of Saracen arms which would have made the Tenth Commandment a stumbling-block to any connoisseur.

Very often during the summer of 1916, as on this occasion, we worked from Ruad up and down the Syrian coast reconnoitring Beirut, Junie, and towns south, and rarely passing the Turkish base at El Arish without dropping a complimentary bomb thereon. At the same time, our duties were becoming more difficult by reason of the increasing number of enemy machines, which were growing to be a serious menace to our comfort.

In July persistent rumours, from native and other sources, asserted that a Zeppelin was to be employed by the enemy. We were sent therefore to make a special reconnaissance at Beersheba, where the big sheds recently erected were supposed to be intended for a base from which the airship would attack Port Said and Egypt generally. In anticipation of such attacks a small camp for fast aeroplanes had been established near the harbour at Port Said. The flight to Beersheba *via* Shellal, which I made with Commander Samson, was a longish one, 60 miles overland. As it was undertaken shortly after four o'clock in the morning, the low mist protected us from too much inquisitive attention from any aircraft that might be about, but the same mist was a great handicap to photography. The light reaching the plate is much modified by the atmosphere. It follows therefore that the distance of the object from the lens is of prime importance. Now we were taking "oblique" pictures, which meant that parts of the area photographed were several miles from the camera. Hence our difficulties, which hardly exist in the case of "vertical" photography.

All these overland flights were made at heights of from a thousand to two thousand feet. I doubt whether the reconnaissance machines we had could have been persuaded to go much higher. It will be seen, therefore, that anxiety arose from the possibility of engine failure, for the gliding angle from two thousand feet would not take one any distance towards safety, and, moreover, landing on sand in a machine intended to come down on water is bound to result in a nasty crash. At first we were not too much

troubled by the fear of real " Archie " or modern aircraft. When the latter did arrive our losses were immediate. The experiences of those who landed in the desert varied considerably, and depended largely on the neighbourhood in which the forced descent took place. Captain Clemson, as I have mentioned, was shot after landing. On the other hand, a young officer, who spoke Arabic perfectly, made immediate friends with the Turks to whom he was brought, and won £40 off the officers' mess at poker the first night he was a prisoner. He came down in a Nieuport. An observer, however, who landed with the French pilot De Saisieux, showing some signs of fight, was killed by the Arabs. On another occasion the two who were brought down in an aeroplane (this story I have only on hearsay) after many hours' tramp over the parching desert arrived at dark within sight of the Suez Canal. One of them, whilst attempting to attract the attention of the Indian sentry, was shot dead, a tragic ending to so gallant and determined a struggle for life. One of our best pilots, who was lost near El Arish, was roughly handled by the Arabs. On account of the heat he started off, I remember, in shoes, shorts, and a thin merino vest and we believed his treatment to be due to the fact that his appearance was not sufficiently impressive. After this, therefore, we all used to go up in our best coats with all badges of rank showing, and those who had them were very careful to wear their decorations. This, it was thought, would ensure at any rate courteous treatment from the Turk, whose reputation for being a " gentleman " appears to be based on his abstaining

## SYRIAN AND ARABIAN COASTS III

from ill-treating those who seem able or likely to retaliate.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the French, the trade by the dhows along the Syrian coast was much more persistent than it should have been. Warships, even small T.B.D.'s, were unable to restrain it, for when they appeared the dhows would simply make for the shore and beach themselves, the crew escaping and returning at some future period to resume possession of the ship. One scheme which had been suggested to entrap these contraband merchants originated in the ingenious and fertile brain of an intelligence officer at Port Said, who, having spent some years exhuming the remains of, let us say, the Jebusite civilisation, was diverting his exact and profound local knowledge to the service of the War.

This intrepid sportsman persuaded someone, I think it must have been the French, to present him with a small schooner about 45 ft. long which had served at one time as a post-boat on the Turkish coast and was a prize of war. As I had, in my early days, been a small boat sailor, and as the other participants possessed no experience of sailing, I was invited to become the navigator for the projected expedition. With the permission of my commanding officer, therefore, I spent some time at Port Said making arrangements to go to sea in the little craft. The dhows—this was the plan—would not suspect any harm from our extremely Oriental-looking ship, which except for its rig, consisting of two undersized lateen sails, bore no small resemblance in a diminutive way to the *Great Harry*. A high poop and richly carved taffrail and a low bow, in which we mounted a

little French 3-pounder gun, made up the lines of our privateer. We should have worn jack-boots, sombreros, and cutlasses to complete the picture.

Let me say at once, in order to avoid giving a false impression, that in the end the expedition came to nothing ; but our preparations in themselves formed a romance. First as to our means of propulsion. I pointed out that the sails alone were useless. Thereupon I was referred to the engine. The engine was strange indeed, a Swedish, one-cylinder, oil contraction. For some weeks it was impossible to find out how to start it, and the mechanic, whom the French kindly lent us, could make no progress. In the Suez Canal workshops everyone was most interested and most obliging, so we had little difficulty in getting a special starting handle constructed, only to find that without its use the fly-wheel could occasionally be got going for a few thrilling moments. At such times the very graceful hull was shaken by the throb of the engine, and you could almost hear the rivets pattering as they dropped out of the timbers. Now a new trouble arose. Although we had discovered how to start the engine we were not able to predetermine the direction in which it would revolve, so that occasionally the vessel started going forward and occasionally backward. It was like a coalition ; no one could say which of its constituent tendencies it would at any moment satisfy. However, we pushed on and one bright Sunday morning with a company of visitors, some enthusiasts and some mockers, we went to sea for a test. As there was a beam wind we got our ship safely into the outer harbour, past the de Lesseps statue, under sail.

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**BOMB HITTING GOODS TRAINS AT AFTER, AUG. 1916.  
Pilot, COMMANDER SAMSON. Observer, CAPTAIN BENN.**

Here the engine was started and to our delight gave us the forward variety of its assistance. However, in a few moments, with a deep "ggrh," it came to a full stop and our sails had to be depended on. What we had to do was to turn about to go home and get repaired, but I then confirmed my suspicions that it was impossible with the sail area we carried to make the ship go about, especially in the moderate sea running. With a "dud" engine and useless sails the schooner was clearly out of the question for our scheme. Moreover, the "secrecy" was somewhat blown upon, for as we passed the French warship *Jeanne d'Arc*, the sailors lined the sides and cheered heartily. There could not have been an Arab baby in the town who was not fully apprised of the aims and methods of our expedition. So I had to abandon a voyage surely as interesting as that Columbus had undertaken with no more seaworthy means. I must add, to finish the story, that my friend, a most undefeated fellow, went out in his ship, got in close to shore, and attacked a fort in a very gallant manner; but his vessel becoming unmanageable, and having a wounded crew, he had to be rescued from a very difficult situation.

The *Ben-my-Chree*, of course, was also used against the dhows, and one ship we were frequently told of and asked to destroy was a red-painted schooner which was supposed to be carrying ammunition down the coast for the Turkish troops. The reader may judge of Samson's pleasure when one day in July, as we were making our way to Haifa, to carry out a reconnaissance of the valley, we observed three schooners heading south. They must have seen us

long before we saw them, for the *Ben-my-Chree* was a very conspicuous object, and the apparition of its great floating hangar was a source of continual disquiet along the hundreds of miles of the Turkish coast. We had some evidence of the notice taken of us from the fact that as we passed at night beacons were lit to indicate the danger. It was no surprise, therefore, on this occasion that the first of the schooners mentioned made off at once. Here a pretty piece of "team" work was done by a seaplane and our ship. The seaplane went off and headed the two other schooners from the shore, driving the leading vessel, which was our red-painted objective, in the direction of the *Ben-my-Chree*. The second, however, escaped and was beached. The red schooner was then destroyed by the joint efforts of ourselves and our little French escort, the *Arbalète*. She blew up with a big explosion, confirming our belief in her contraband character.

The next day, July 25th, we carried out one of our reconnaissances of the Nazareth Valley from Haifa to Afuleh, an important junction on the Aleppo-Beersheba Railway. This valley became very familiar ground to us, and I myself made no fewer than seven flights over it. The Turks evidently feared that a landing might be attempted at Haifa Bay, for there were trenches and defences all sited towards the sea. Our reconnaissance on this occasion made it clear that a large camp and dump were being established at the railway junction. It was this information which really engendered the plan for a big attack to be made in the ensuing month.

These journeys at under 2,000 feet really resemble a motor drive more than an aerial flight. They pro-

vide a wonderful opportunity of viewing the beauties of the country. Nazareth on its hill, seen at five in the morning as the sun is dissipating the thin mist, is a picture not to be forgotten. As we crossed the beach our height was often only a few hundred feet, and we could distinguish clearly the shepherds, who appeared to regard us with no ill-favour, even waving a greeting. The soldiers, however, especially at the camp at Tubaun, which is halfway up the valley, were always on the watch, and I well remember the C.O. directing my attention to a stolid old Turk who was standing taking deliberate aim at us with an old-fashioned rifle and black powder. His chance was a poor one, for a target 300 yards away changing position at the rate of sixty miles an hour is not easily hit. Still, fortune varies, for six months later near a Red Sea fort one of our observers was shot dead in exactly this way, an Arab soldier who had probably never heard of an A.A. gun taking a pot-shot from the beach and killing Lieut. Nathel Stewart—a most devoted officer—who was directing artillery fire. Anti-aircraft and aerial weapons will undergo incredible development in the future. For the present, from the air, point-blank aiming with machine-guns is all that is attempted. But this itself is an enormous advance. A training book which we had in use contained an argument in favour of the carbine as being better than the rifle for the observer. Major Fletcher in Syria in 1915 never carried anything but a rifle and sometimes not even that. And this was orthodoxy only a year before all machines were fitted with two or even three machine-guns with intricate interruptor gears. So swift were the changes.

For the rest of July the *Ben-my-Chree* had to go into dock, so that only the two old German prizes were available for work. On the *Raven* fell the main burden, which was partly to watch the Mediterranean coast road, along which the Turks had been driven back about as far as Bir-el-Mazar; and partly the more interesting task of visiting the Gulf of Akaba and the east coast of the Red Sea as far as Mowila and Sherm Wej.

The map will remind my readers that the Gulf of Akaba is at the extreme north of the Red Sea where, cutting into the coast, it forms the Sinai peninsula. The great supply route for the Turkish forces in the Hedjaz, and Arabia in general, was the railway passing through Maan near Akaba to Medina in the south, and it was thought possible to cut this railway by means of a landing. The survey of the town and neighbourhood and their defences was to be made with a view to seeing whether such a scheme was practicable. Akaba turned out to be entirely undefended, as far as could be seen, but at Sherm Wej there were fortifications and the aircraft were attacked by riflemen who as they fired black powder disclosed to their own hurt the whole line of their trench. One man on the R.I.M. ship *Hardinge* was wounded by snipers from the shore, but they got better than they gave.

At Mowila a very amusing incident took place. A small party with an officer, landed under a white flag, had an interview with a Turkish sergeant who was apparently in command. From conversation with him it was discovered that there were about 300 troops in the neighbourhood. As to the forces

opposing him, the sergeant could only see two ships, the *Raven* and *Hardinge*, but he was assured—this, I fear, was a flight of imagination or hope—that there were many others about to arrive and that it was our definite intention to seize the town. In these circumstances he was advised honourably to yield. To his credit it must be said that though he received our party with the greatest courtesy he firmly declined to consent to any surrender, so that all that was left to our side was the rather humiliating course of firing a few parting shots and making off.

It can easily be imagined that it was no pleasant task to carry out the numerous and tiresome flights required to make our photographic surveys, for it must be remembered we had no fixed apparatus and no sights. Everything had to be done with a hand camera, each plate being changed separately. Moreover, we developed and printed on board ship, no easy task in an old cargo vessel whose builders and designers, whatever they had thought of, had never dreamed of their craft being used in the Red Sea in torrid August weather as a photographic establishment.

Flying in the Gulf of Akaba was the nearest we got to actual work in the Sinai. We certainly were asked once to fly over the mountains and reconnoitre, but the report returned by the pilot that he had observed "One Bedouin with baby" discouraged other operation orders of the same kind. Our indispensable friend Mandeville invests the desert with more interest than experience in the end confirms. The lamp at the Church of St. Catherine, he says, is fed with oil from branches of bays and olive carried by

ravens, crows and choughs every year. We never saw these flights of birds, though we lived for some time in the neighbouring desert. Nor did we strike the alluring spot where : " No flies, toads or lizards, or such foul, venomous beasts, nor lice nor fleas ever enter by the miracle of God and Our Lady."

The *Raven* on her return from the Red Sea took part in further work on the coast, where she was subject to much unpleasant attention from enemy aircraft. One adventure at least happened. A single-seater Sopwith having made a flight over Haifa Bay failed to return to the ship. A Short with two officers was accordingly dispatched to find out what was the matter and observed the single-seater drifting in a helpless condition towards the ancient walled city of Acre. The rescue party came down on to the water and the shipwrecked pilot, abandoning his machine, swam to them and clambered into the observer's seat. The next care was by a brisk fusillade to sink the Sopwith. Now a difficulty arose. It was impossible to get the Short off the water with two persons in the back seat, so the accommodating observer was compelled to sit up above the pilot on the somewhat warm radiator. Being thus on the dead centre of the machine, he restored the balance and they all successfully returned home ; the while, the inhabitants of Acre, which has put up a fight in its day, gazed on listlessly. Perhaps they were thinking of Richard or Napoleon.

The *Anne* in the meantime had been busy assisting the French to destroy a munition factory on the coast near Mersina.

## CHAPTER XVII

### AN AIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE BAGDAD RAILWAY

As soon as the *Ben-my-Chree* had emerged from the docking operations we developed our plan for an effective examination of the enemy lines of communication from the Haifa Valley in the north down as far as El Mazar, which is on the coast road between Palestine and Port Said. Preliminary flights took place on August 14th and 15th, and covered the Haifa-Nazareth Valley, Jaffa, Ludd, Ramleh, El Falujeh, Gaza, Bureir, El Shellal and Rafa as well as El Mazar and the eastern end of the Bardawil Lake. Most of these places line on or about the railway from Aleppo to Egypt, of which I have already spoken. Particularly objectionable to the enemy must have been the raid on Afuleh, for this was the sixth time the railway station and dump had been attacked. On this occasion a goods train was wrecked and the stores in the station yard were set on fire. A good deal of activity was observed at Ramleh and Ludd, and what was a considerable surprise was the discovery at Bureir of a big camp protected by trenches.

In the light of the information which had been gained we planned the operations for August 24th to 29th. This was to be the beau ideal of flying effort on the



Syrian coast, planned for once, as we air enthusiasts thought, as it would always have been planned had we had an Air Staff. The railway was to be tackled above Aleppo, where it crosses two broad streams. From this extreme north point right to Rafa on the very border of Egypt, the Turk for three days was to become a stranger to peace and safety. I looked forward very eagerly to this week, for it seemed to me to be a fine culmination of all the preparatory labour of the summer. This desire to finish the job made me decline the offer, of the first Coalition Government, to return immediately and become Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Munitions.

The beginning of the great onslaught was directed against the familiar objective, the Afuleh dump. Three ships were to be employed and every machine we could get into the air. We were all to meet in the bay off Haifa at dawn on August 25th. We fortunate beings in the *Ben-my-Chree*, with its high speed, naturally gave a long start to the two other seaplane carriers which trundled off escorted by the French trawler *Paris 11*—which afterwards rescued the bulk of us when the *Ben-my-Chree* was sunk—and the French destroyer *Hache*. At five o'clock on the 24th we left Port Said accompanied by our old companion the *Arbalète* under the command of Captain Monnaque. Monnaque was not only the best of good fellows and a most faithful watchdog—for it was not always comfortable for a small T.B.D. to follow a great ship like ours through bad weather—but he was also a warm friend, and his poetical efforts in praise of the *Ben-my-Chree* were not the least attractive features of the wonderful luncheons he used

to provide in his little ship. And so we started on our night journey to the rendezvous.

One of our minor hardships, of a general kind, was in the matter of "lights out." Naturally, except below, not a glimmer was allowed, and as most of the crew slept on deck on account of the heat, it was not an easy matter on a dark night to get about without accident. It was, however, the ventilation that suffered most from the need for darkness. The ward-room with its scuttles screwed up acquired during the night a hot and stuffy climate which proved irresistible to the myriads of the humbler creation who were our shipmates. Though shy in daytime, they were so bold at dawn that it was necessary sometimes actually to shake them off the biscuits which formed their supper and also the morning meal for us early fliers. Of this meal the remainder consisted of a drink in which not the most analytical palate could definitely determine the precise proportions of tea, coffee and cocoa.

I have already mentioned—I would not call it the antagonism—that would be far from the truth—but the genial class-consciousness distinguishing the airmen and the seamen respectively. An amusing instance of this occurred the very morning we arrived at Haifa. About half-past three we were all hurrying to and fro preparing for our duties, collecting and testing our gear, goggles, flying caps, cameras, etc., when it became apparent that something was amiss. The ship was being followed by a big wash and suddenly began to bump heavily. Peering through the darkness we seemed to see the coast only a few yards away. The fact was we had inaugurated the

day badly by going ashore on a small uncharted sand-bank off Athlit. As we slowly realised the position it began to dawn on us all that, should we eventually stick there, we were in for trouble. To begin with, we were only a few miles from a fortified camp, where there were certainly 6-inch guns with an adjacent railway that could bring them to the shore. Our defence at the best was the two 12-pounders which might possibly be brought to bear landwards. The repeated bumps seemed to knock these ideas into our reluctant heads.

Despite this dawning misgiving, all true airmen felt a certain quiet satisfaction at this, the final discomfiture of the navigators. However, the duty of all of us would have been, I presume, to stick to the ship, so we were involved in a common fate, except, I remember, Bentley Dacre, who was jokingly waving his order to join the *Raven* as soon as she arrived in the Bay. Never did a swifter Nemesis attend anyone, for having joined the *Raven* he was brought down the same afternoon and fell a prisoner into the hands of the Arabs.

However, the engine-room staff came to the rescue. Some manoeuvre which I did not understand was carried out and after about a quarter-of-an-hour we slid off into deeper water.

The two sister ships having by this time arrived, we were all preparing to "out seaplanes." The orders were to fly in what sailors call starboard-quarter-line, which means that everyone was to keep a straight line to the right and rear of the leading machine, which for this purpose had a red-painted fin—for some reason no one had thought of streamers—and

was to rise first from the water and circle round the squadron ships, as a signal for the others to take off. The seaplanes from the three ships were allotted different heights. Ours were to fly at 1,500 ft., those from the *Raven* at 600 to 700 ft., and those from the *Anne* at 1,700 ft. The Sopwiths were to look out for hostile aircraft, and the special duty of the *Raven* machines was to turn a little south of Jezebel's city and attack the railway. The rest of us were to concentrate on the stores and base at Afuleh.

A poet were needed to describe the beauty of the scene as the squadron rose ; the blue bay of Haifa ; to the right the clean white town surmounted by the black woods on the heights of Carmel ; away to the north, separated from us by low-lying marshes, the ancient city of Acre, itself a " God-with-us " of British history ; the sun not fully risen but reddening the horizon ; the seaplanes tearing through the water to acquire flying speed ; their tail-floats throwing up a light spray which being caught in the first beams of sunlight formed tiny rainbows, bright fairies ever pursuing each dark messenger of death. It was all beautiful not only to the eye but to the mind also, for it was the realisation of many hopes and the crown of much labour.

None of the plans went wrong, but naturally, as this was the seventh time we had attacked the Valley, a good deal of preparation had been made by the enemy in anticipation. The old guns at Tubaun on this occasion took no notice of us, but Archies had been planted round the Afuleh base, and as the squadron approached something resembling a barrage

was put up. Seeing the formation to be perfect and the attack launched well to plan, Samson was full of excitement—we were in the first machine—and shouted to me with delight. This reminds me that until I became accustomed to it, one of my main troubles as a would-be dutiful observer was the frequency and, I am afraid I should add, the occasional incompatibility of the orders shouted at me in the air by my trusted C.O. Those who flew in well-equipped bombers and photographic machines in France will smile to hear that with us the wretched observer was accustomed to sit with his camera, note-book, map, Verey pistol, etc., scattered on the floor or in his lap; in addition to which he would perhaps have half-a-dozen 15 lb. bombs tied with string to the longerons or clasped with the rest of his “mixed bag” on his knees. Samson, who had a real eagle-vision, was always pointing out this or that minute object to be noted and was subject to sudden spasms of desire for a bomb to be thrown (bomb sights were not heard of then) or a photograph to be taken. At first I would, in response to the multiple orders hurled at me, attempt to do all processes at once, but I soon learned that calm was necessary to prevent the bomb being launched complete with safety pin, so that it would never explode, the note being taken at the wrong place, or the photographic plate being exposed with the cap still left on the lens.

But to return to our visit to Afuleh. I suppose it must have lasted about half-an-hour, the machines circling and raining bombs on the dump and the railway. A train in the station, observing that the raid was about to take place, made off to the south.

This was truly jumping from the frying-pan into the fire, for the flight from the *Raven* had gone that way. They caught that goods train, and as the photographs clearly revealed, hit the rear coach and destroyed the railway track immediately the train had passed. Fortunately, all our squadron returned without any casualties, although there was hardly a machine that was not considerably shot up. That was the last word of the *Ben-my-Chree* against Afuleh.

As soon as everyone was hoisted in, which would be about seven o'clock, I suppose, the three ships turned south to carry out an attack on a stone bridge near the Bureir camp of which I have already spoken. On the way down, near Jaffa, we caught up with two dhows, one of which pursued the usual tactics of making for the beach and was destroyed by gunfire by the French T.B.D. after we had observed a score or more of soldiers to leap out and scramble ashore. The other, which was much smaller, showed signs of surrender. What a moment for the seamen and navigators! At last they, too, were to engage in this desperate war! So a motor-boat, armed with a machine-gun, was sent out manned by sailors. One of our officers took the surrender of the dhow which was subsequently brought in as a prize to Port Said. The crew, wretched-looking creatures, admitted that the trade in which they were engaged was that of furnishing supplies for the Sinai troops.

All this slightly delayed our journey south, but by about midday seven machines were ready and flew to the stone bridge crossing the Wadi el Hesi, south of Gaza, near Bureir. Great was our sorrow when it became known a little later that Dacre had failed to

return. We waited till dusk in the hope that some news of him might be received and the coast was patrolled lest he should have come down in the sea, but finally the *Ben-my-Chree* was compelled to steam off, leaving the *Anne* to stand by in case there should be any chance of a rescue.

Our first day's campaign therefore had hit the Turk near Beersheba in the south and Nazareth in the north, and had hit him fairly hard considering our tiny power. On the night of August 25th the three ships separated. Further blows were to be delivered the next day, on other points of the great line of communication to the north. After her fruitless search for Dacre the *Anne* appeared on August 26th off Jaffa, and flights were made to bomb the stations at Ramleh and Tulkeram. At the same moment the *Ben-my-Chree* was off the coast near Ruad, well to the north, ready to attack the railway at Homs, where, as it is far from the sea and protected by high hills, the Turks could hardly have been expecting us. Major England and Captain King were in one machine and the commanding officer and I were to try in the other. At the same time, a Sopwith was sent out, not with the intention of reaching the railway, for that was impossible with its petrol capacity, but to reconnoitre the fortified posts on the Lebanon mountains. Our machine, unfortunately, totally failed to achieve what was desired, but Major England and his observer reached Homs, a very fine feat deservedly rewarded by the Distinguished Service Cross.

So much for our efforts on August 26th. The next day the seaplanes, this time from the *Raven*, were scores of miles west at Adalia, attacking a factory

near Fineka. Two days after that the *Ben-my-Chree* was in Alexandretta Bay and we flew to Adana—a most bumpy journey—and had another cut at the railway, besides reconnoitring its military weakness where it crosses the rivers Jeihan and Seihan.

And so home, contented with our work. No less than five points of the single line of communication had been assailed, sometimes in force, and the enemy had received surprise visits at places separated by hundreds of miles from Adalia in Asia Minor to Bureir on the Egyptian frontier. Of this campaign we were justly proud.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### MAINLY ABOUT CYPRUS

FOR the early part of September, our work mainly consisted of W.T. spotting for the ships and monitors which were attacking the coast road. Wireless has always held for me the greatest charm, and is capable of infinite development, under sympathetic treatment which it did not always receive, in the direction of long range spotting for ships' guns, messages being both sent to and received from the air. The ordinary Artillery observation on a corps front is only a very limited application of the possibilities of the invention. Let me illustrate what can be done even with half-trained *personnel* and ordinary apparatus, from a flight we made early one morning to examine Beersheba, where the persistent efforts of the A.A. guns made it clear that our attentions were unwelcome at that moment. Our observations were not sensational, but it was most satisfactory by means of a carefully squared map and a pre-arranged code to be able to wireless a continuous account of what we saw as we saw it. The message would run "2943," which showed the kilometre square "100 CY/S," meaning "100 C-Y," i.e. "cavalry" going S., that is, south. Of course this was only a

COMMANDER SAMSON, D.S.O.



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scratch code for this experiment and would not defy for an hour the enemy's cryptogram department. But the messages were all picked up and read by the ship, from which at times we were thirty-five miles distant, and a great number of them were also taken at Port Said which must have been ninety miles away.

This work would have repaid much labour, but the difficulty was to get sufficient practice with the ships and also to get the flying officers to become sufficiently expert. I have never understood the reason why the power to send the Morse code on a key, as telegraphists do, at a reasonable speed, say twenty-five words per minute, should not be as much a part of the early education of the flying officer as French is of the schoolboy. To wait till a young man is twenty and then to try to make him learn Morse is to create, of course, a very tedious task. My own case, for instance, was sad. I was thirty-nine, and though my efforts did eventually get me up to a speed of about sixteen, the process was laborious in the extreme. Generally speaking, the young fellows would not take the trouble to do well, thinking that the capacity to make simple signals slowly was sufficient. As a matter of fact, proficiency in this, which is the chief means of communication in the air, should become a matter demanding no more than the exercise of the subliminal consciousness. Practice with the ships was difficult to get. The French, indeed, were very keen and we carried out a number of test flights with their flagship the *Pothuau*. These had a great success, the observer sometimes terminating the exercise with a little compliment sent *en clair* in the French language.

In the autumn, the enemy began to show more than their usual aerial activity. On September 1st they had paid a visit to Port Said and unluckily had severely damaged the *Raven*, killing and wounding nine persons. About a week later we had out a two-seater escorted by two Sopwiths observing on the coast road for H.M.S. *Espiègle*. An aeroplane which easily soared above our machine attacked first the Sopwiths, killing poor Bankes-Price, and shooting down Nightingale, a Canadian pilot who was in the other machine. Nightingale was subsequently picked up by a monitor, and his machine saved by one of the trawlers which were acting as escort. In the meantime, the hostile aeroplane made for the now unprotected two-seater, but without bringing him down. A third Sopwith had been forced to descend on the water, the machine being lost, though the pilot was rescued. Thus we finished a most unfortunate day with little successful work done and a high proportion of casualties, the only machine which by chance had not been hit being that of our commanding officer, who, as usual, had been taking the air. During September we went out with the French, with whom we always welcomed orders to work, not only because of the pleasant companionship, but also because these joint enterprises usually meant a few days at sea, and a consequent visit to Cyprus to coal.

Mallock's book is good, Mandeville is better, so far as he goes, but the island itself is best of all. Sir John calls Famagusta "one of the finest harbours of the sea in the world," an opinion we could hardly endorse, as there was only room enough for us to enter backwards. But the ruins of the city hint at

what its glory was in the old days. Sir John could not have seen the wonderful and still complete Venetian fortifications providing valuable lessons, in the arrangement for enfilade fire, sally ports and the like, for the trench builder of to-day. And then the churches! Perhaps the whole 365 were in existence in Sir John's days. The ruins of many are still seen. The rulers, the Lusignans, I suppose, imported French architects who designed in the Gothic style, so that the cathedral at Famagusta is a miniature Rheims—but where else would you find a Rheims Cathedral as a background with a camel and palm in the foreground to set it off, the middle distance showing a minaret from which the Muezzin is calling the faithful to prayer in this northern cathedral? Fortunately, the Turks, who occupy the city, for the Greeks live elsewhere, seem not to expand, not to obtrude on this vast museum of ancient art.

The capital, Nicosia, is far more like an ordinary Greek town, not fortified as the Port is, in consequence of which it surrendered at once to the foreign invader against whom Famagusta made so stout a fight.

There is a timelessness about regions where nothing has happened for five centuries. Mandeville speaks of the cross of the good thief Dismas at Cyprus, as if it had been to him a souvenir of yesterday. Then there was St. Barnabas born here. The castle of Amours, where lies the body of St. Hilarion, is unchanged, and the story of the marriage at Limasol of Richard I to Berengaria seems recent gossip. We saw, indeed, no traces of the trenches made by the inhabitants to sit in for coolness, as described in the "Voyages and Travels," but great trenches there are

in the fields, made just too wide for the locusts to jump. So they fall in and perish and their ravages are stayed.

Kyrene, across the island from Famagusta, was the castle of the Cornaro, of whom the song is written :

“Is she wronged ?—to the rescue of her honour  
My heart !  
Is she poor ?—What costs it to be styled a donor ?  
Merely an earth's to cleave a sea's to part.  
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her !  
Nay list—bade Kate the Queen,  
But still cried the maiden binding her tresses  
’Tis only a page that carols unseen,  
Fitting your hawks their jesses !”

The castle, with its towers and drawbridge, is there to-day, only the page is gone and Kate. Later the fortunes of war were to take us to Asolo, where, to be lady, she renounced the Crown of Cyprus, and where the peasants still keep her memory green.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LUCKLESS "PERISVET"

It was with the French that we carried out the only other excursion during the autumn, a trip to Adalia, where a battery had attacked the sea patrols. The Admiral under whom we were working was in a smart little converted yacht belonging to Menier, the "chocolate king," who at one time had received, as an honoured guest, the German Emperor himself, and William's signed portrait hung in the ward-room as a memento of the visit. When our little fleet was gathered, there was first about an hour-and-a-half's firing by the several craft, whose gunnery I controlled with wireless, both sending and receiving messages. Golfers should revel in this delightful pursuit. It is "putting" *in excelsis* to watch every shot and see how by careful advice and adjustment the next stroke can be made to hole out on the target.

I think, however, we were barking up the wrong tree, for it was an enemy battery elsewhere which actually opened fire. Woodland and one of our pilots went off at once to drop a bomb on it, and the little French vessels became wonderfully active, darting into the shore, and firing vigorously with their tiny armament. The Menier yacht was hit



through the funnel, and one man wounded. In the meantime a submarine scare was started by someone in the *Ben-my-Chree*. Our fairly high speed set up a wash in our wake, which as we made zig-zag turns intersected itself and created just the sort of swirl caused by the periscope of a U-boat. At least that is what it looked like to our scared watchman, who ran along the deck disturbing our exciting battle with the shore, by crying out to Samson, who was on the uppermost bridge (known as Monkey Island), "Submarines, sir!" If anyone was giving too much thought to the scare he was provided with something else to think about in the shape of the Commander's views, in good Doric, audible throughout the length of the ship, but not to be reproduced textually here. "You will be seeing a Zeppelin next," was the general gist.

Shortly after sunset a Council of War was held in the Admiral's yacht, the trawler captains, ourselves, and the destroyer officers meeting to discuss the situation. It was decided that nothing more could be done at Adalia, and we resolved therefore on a flight in the morning round the island of Castelorizo, to hunt for some guns which had been reported near there. I will add that the next morning we went to Castelorizo and searched the hills on the mainland, but found no guns and thought little of the whole task, not dreaming that two months later that very battery was to be the one to rob us of our ship.

December was an active month for us, for on several occasions the old familiar ground in Palestine as far as Haifa valley was re-examined. On the afternoon of December 1st Nightingale and Woodland made the

usual circular flight through Jaffa, Ramleh and Ludd. The ship standing close into the shore was in sight of the machine the whole time and our watchmen could likewise see the fliers. It was a peaceful afternoon on this lovely coast and our minds were not too much absorbed by the mere war. There are English associations with Ramleh and Jerusalem, specific ties. Everybody knows that the Cross was rescued by the mother of the Emperor Constantine, but not everybody realises that she was the daughter of our King Cole, and was born in Colchester. By Ramleh, too, is the church where St. George was beheaded, so Britons feel no strangers hereabouts.

Thoughts of this kind were interrupted by realities when it was noticed that Ramleh camp was putting up an active opposition to our men and suddenly, to our horror, our machine was seen to be hit and go down behind the dunes, out of control. Major England and I went out immediately in our second Short to see if anything could be found of our two friends, who we feared had been killed. We encountered the same unfriendly reception from a large camp at Ramleh, but were unable to learn anything of the fate of the first machine. It was months before we heard the glad news that both officers were alive.

The afternoon was rounded off by an incident of a lighter kind. Two hostile aeroplanes had come out to bomb the ship. It is obvious that they were not much on the alert, for they did not spot a great soggy Short which was about to come alongside to be hoisted in. Had the enemy seen him they could undoubtedly have destroyed him, and have made it very unpleasant for us, for we should have stopped to pick him up.

Our man, however, it was the astute Captain Clemson, quickly detected the enemy and keeping away off to sea headed south, followed by the ship at full speed zig-zagging. Thinking we were making off and not caring to follow us to sea, the enemy abandoned the pursuit. It was simple then to pick up our men and go home.

The bulk of the work during the winter was pure routine flying, but an incident on January 4th calls for special mention. Returning very tired after three days at sea, and a very rough sea at that, with the ship stuffy, having been closed down, and us not heartened by work done, we were disgusted to find we had to wait an hour at the entrance of the Suez Canal to give way to the Russian ship *Perisvet*. She had been sunk by the Japanese in the old war, had been raised by them, sold back with true business instinct to the Russians, and was now on her way to the Baltic, I suppose. We stood aside till she passed us and went to our berth rather annoyed with our Allies, who were keeping us from dinner—and they going home to boot.

We might well have been more sympathetic, for almost immediately after leaving us, the *Perisvet* blew up at the entrance of the harbour and began to sink. She had been convoyed by armed trawlers, who hearing the explosion and seeing the ship in a sinking condition came to her assistance. It was getting dark, however, and apparently the crew of the *Perisvet* had been ordered to "action" stations. Seeing the approaching ships and believing them—heaven knows why—to be the enemy, they fired, with the result that the trawlers were unable to save any

but a small section of the unfortunate ship's company. I give the story as we all heard it. It bears some resemblance to the Dogger Bank incident. What the explosion was I cannot say for certain, but it is believed it was caused by a bomb secreted by a spy just before the warship left the harbour.

And now as to our final successful expedition. I have often spoken of the Turks' dependence for supplies on the Northern Railway. There is the one line through Asia Minor to a point just north of Aleppo, at which point the Bagdad Railway proper separates from the line to the south. If these communications could be cut above Aleppo, two birds could be killed with one stone.

Such a plan must have been often considered. Many people spoke of a landing at Alexandretta (in the north-east corner of the Mediterranean), and I believe there was a big attempt to bluff the Turks into a belief that such a landing was to be tried. At Cyprus, near Famagusta, immense camps had been surveyed and notices placed everywhere in Greek and English indicating standings for horses, sitting for tents, roads and the rest, in fact, accommodation for many thousands of troops. Moreover, in the Intelligence Office at Port Said, visible through the open window from the road, was a very big sketch map of Alexandretta. All these preparations seemed intended to convince the spies who swarmed that a force was to be encamped at Cyprus as a base for an attack on the mainland.

Of the propriety of military plans I am not qualified to speak, but as to the air, it seems to me that there was a failure to understand what was possible in the

way of attack on the Bagdad Railway. For air operations Alexandretta would have been, of course, quite the wrong place to start. Just west of it on the coast of Asia Minor is Karataash Burnu, a sandy cape. Near here two rivers flow into the sea, the Seihan and the Jeihan, and over these rivers by long girder bridges passes the single track line which feeds all the armies of the East. The bridges are separated from the coast by about fifteen miles of low ground, over which even our patched-up apparatus could fly. Here was indeed the bottle-neck. And the orders we received on December 24th to do our worst against the Chikaldir bridge—one of those I have referred to—promised us a real merry Christmas.

The *Raven* was coming with us carrying two Shorts (two-seaters) and we were to take one Short and three Sopwiths (single-seaters). It was bad luck on the *Raven*, because with her limited speed she was compelled to leave Port Said on the afternoon of Christmas Day, whereas we spent our Christmas night, and a very jolly one too, in the harbour. No landsman should attempt to describe festivities on board ship, but I know that at the end of a dinner which was adorned by the presence of some of our French colleagues—I rather fancy Captain Monnaque composed a special poem for the occasion—the whole ship's company, more or less elated, passed through the ward-room each telling the Commanding Officer his inmost thoughts with a freedom proper to the time of Saturnalia. That good-humour should have survived this severe test was a striking proof that we were a happy ship.

Friendship was offered me by an old sea-salt,

warmed by the prevailing spirit, a regular shell-back, as I had always believed, whose welcome approaches turned out, however, to be due to the fact that he was a driver of one of the L.C.C. trams and an admirer of my father.

However, no feasting could make any difference to the due departure of the ship, and so on the morning of the 26th we left the harbour, our little orchestra playing lustily.

I have said nothing so far about the *Ben-my-Chree* band, but that does not mean that it deserves no mention. It was the discovery, or rather the invention, of Commander Samson, who found that between the stewards, one or two stokers, a Levantine baker, and, I think, a seaman, there was the necessary material. The fiddle, wind instruments and drum soon learned a few popular airs which became the ship *motif* for us all for ever. They were turned on as we entered or left the harbour, and great was the pride excited in the breasts of the inhabitants of Port Said thereby. For we were no mystery ship to that pleasant cosmopolitan town. It was impossible, however secret our missions, to conceal the fact of our departure as the hangar alone made the vessel a conspicuous object for miles. Besides this, the Arab contractors always knew more about our plans than we did ourselves. I do not feel that I am exaggerating when I say that Port Said had a feeling for the *Ben-my-Chree*.

I am afraid, on the other hand, that we were not always as popular with the Navy as we might have been, but this may have been due to the occasional *double entendre* of our orchestral performances. There

was one of the ships, for instance, which for perfectly obvious reasons had never left the Canal during the War. Was it quite wise to instruct the orchestra to play as we passed "Keep the Home Fires Burning"?

But to return to our expedition. We arrived off Karataash Burnu on the morning of December 27th, but had to wait a little time for the *Raven*, which had been delayed by mines at Port Said. The plan of campaign was as follows. The Commanding Officer and Clemson were each to fly Sopwiths and carry 65 lb. bombs. They were to be preceded by a two-seater in which the pilot was Captain Guy Smith and I was the observer. Our duty was to fly low, attack the bridge with a 65 lb. bomb, and then engage from a slightly greater height any A.A. defences which we might find while the two Sopwiths came over and delivered their attack. This first phase was carried out successfully. Smith and I found the bridge without difficulty. A train had just passed over it, and was making its way in the Aleppo direction. We decided to pursue the train for a bit, and the engine driver, hearing us in the air, put on full speed to escape. This was, of course, the wrong thing to do, for instead of shooting past our quarry, we slowly crept over it from behind and had much more time to "draw a bead" on it. Engine drivers, when attacked by an aeroplane, stop!

We then turned and following the railway line arrived at the bridge. A railway line is, of course, a splendid guide in assisting to correct for drift, and I thought we were fairly over the bridge when I let go the big bomb from a height of under 300 ft. It

gave us a bump as the upward explosion reached us. When we arrived at the other side we found a guard house, made, like so many huts in the East, of reeds, with a reed roof. The *personnel* was clearly much excited by what was happening, and turned out to fire at us with their rifles. Smith banked the machine so that I could get a bearing with the tracer ammunition, and then I learned more in one second of the moral effect of tracer than ever I knew before. It was bad enough for these old Turks—they would be a sort of National Reserve—to have a machine-gun turned on them from a distance of a few hundred feet, but actually to see the bullets arrive was too much for their nerve and they turned and bolted, like rabbits, into the hut. This, however, availed them nothing, for the roof of the hut was no more impervious to fire than a sheet of paper.

We may assume, therefore, although we did not actually hit the bridge, that we carried out the main part of our job, which was to keep the guard in check. We were delighted in a few moments as we circled round to see Samson and Clemson diving down on the objective. Samson scored one hit, but the other pilot let go his bomb too soon and it hit the embankment before the machine reached the bridge. We then turned and rejoined the ship, but two other Shorts were sent out from the *Raven* and scored one hit on the bridge, and later a Short and two Sopwiths made a third attack. We had now been all day in dangerous waters, and, moreover, we had completed our reconnaissance, having discovered that the coast was considerably entrenched and that guns had been mounted, which tried somewhat ineffectively—being



field guns—to repel our attacks. It was therefore decided to return home.

This was by no means the first time that our seaplanes had attacked this part of the coast, and it was the second time that a definite onslaught had been made on the railway bridges, yet nothing approaching real anti-aircraft defences existed. It was this that convinced me that had the Naval aircraft in the Mediterranean been properly organised under some general plan so that a considerable force could have been concentrated at a given point such as the one we had attacked, the Turks' task of reinforcing and supplying their armies, or indeed maintaining any proper communication with Constantinople, would have been rendered very difficult. Although the photographs of the *Ben-my-Chree's* last attack showed, by a shadow seen through the smoke, that the girders were unbroken, yet damage was certainly done to the bridge, and agents stated that big guns for Bagdad were delayed—a delay of incalculable advantage to the Allies. Generally, I think it may be said that the authorities overlooked the fact that really effective air warfare was a thing the Turks were unprepared to meet. I know quite well that there was a shortage of material, but even at that moment in the Mediterranean there were seaplane carriers and seaplanes which, had they been under the control of a proper General Air Staff, could have aimed very crippling if not vital blows at the enemy

## CHAPTER XX

### THE LOSS OF THE " BEN-MY-CHREE "

THE work on the Bagdad Railway of which I have already spoken seemed to have excited some interest, for immediately after our return the ship was ordered to go back to the Bay of Alexandretta and continue the operations. The weather, however, was too heavy for seaplanes to take off the water and we were accordingly compelled to shelter at Famagusta, whence we were immediately recalled to Port Said.

When our own British General Staff failed us, we were very often able to secure employment from the French, and so it was on this occasion. The operations which we had undertaken with Admiral De Spitz off Adalia encouraged our Allies' Command to give us more work, and we were appointed a rendezvous with their Admiral on January 9th, at the small island of Castelorizo, at this time occupied by the French Naval Forces.

It was blowing hard when we arrived off the island, and for a ship of our bulk with the enormous windage offered by the hangar, it was not an easy matter to negotiate the narrow channel which led into the town harbour. The Admiral, therefore, sent out a French officer in a small boat, who was taken aboard and piloted us to our moorings. The island, as a glance

at the map will show, lies a few score miles south and east of Rhodes ; it is a thousand yards or so from the Turkish shore and its inner harbour receives a natural protection by being turned towards the coast of the mainland.

Castelorizo carries a great air of riches and prosperity. I believe that it has always resisted the efforts of the Turks to collect taxes and dues, and by reason of being a sort of free port has made itself a very considerable trading centre. The town, which had a population of over 10,000, is built round the harbour, on steepish hills, so that its whole extent is seen at a glance.

From what we learned from the gossip that was told us by the French who were in command of the island, the Castelorizans set great store by their ability to provide a substantial dot for their brides, and this dot takes the form of both real and personal estate. Around the outskirts of the town are many houses in an incomplete condition, some just begun, others nearly finished. The place, in fact, looks rather like the wreck of an unsuccessful building boom. The reason, as explained to us, was that on the birth of a girl the father acquires a small piece of land and starts to build a home for the daughter, all members of the family assisting as their leisure permits. Thus in the course of ten or fifteen years—according to the measure of energy expended upon it—the dwelling is ready for occupation by the lucky bride and is her contribution to the new joint-venture. As to personal estate, gold and silver pieces are an integral part of the costume of the women ; they wear little jackets of the richest gold embroidery with coins worked into

# Law of California



BOMB DROPPED BY CAPTAIN BENN ON CHIKALDIR BRIDGE, BAGHDAD RAILWAY. [Page 140.]

patterns. Some of these jackets are worth large sums of money and they form, with the houses, the girls' dowry.

As I have mentioned, we had once, some months before, come into the outer harbour of Castelorizo and made a few flights with the object of seeing whether there was any truth in the rumour that the Turks had brought up a battery on the opposite coast. Both Percy Woodland and I with our respective pilots had searched, but nothing was to be seen. Our failure was now to prove disastrous.

As we entered the harbour the scene struck me as being quite unreal, like a crude setting in some play-booth for an Italian opera. Not far from us was the old " Chocolat Menier " yacht of the Admiral, two little torpedo-boats and a mass of native schooners. Along the front were the shops and cafés with Greek signboards, serving as foreground to the town, which, heaped up behind and intersected by innumerable winding escaliers, formed the back-cloth. Women in clothes brilliant beyond belief, gold embroidery, bright stockings and beautiful head-dresses, with traders and fishermen, grouped on the quay, formed the chorus. There were no workaday folk at all. Though the scene lacked sunshine, we seemed to have stepped into a world of fancy.

We dropped our anchor remote from the main town—a mistake, as it turned out—on the other side of the harbour, under the windows of a few cottages from which two stage figures watched us for an hour without moving. From another cottage an immense family of children gazed at us with unqualified amazement. However. we were too close to these houses

and so, on the score of safety, we warped off, for the wind was blowing very hard on to that shore.

Our famous little band was to go ashore and play in the cathedral square, for there is an imposing Greek church dominating the town on the hillside. There was also an official visit to pay to the Governor, besides the duty of waiting on the French Admiral to receive orders for the operations we were to carry out. From the Frenchmen we were sure of a warm welcome. The middle-aged bearded naval officers in temporary command of the points seized by the French in the Mediterranean were the very mirror of hospitality. Their wish to oblige knew no bounds. There is an old story concerning their good-nature which I repeat as I heard it. Early in the war a party had landed at a city on the Syrian coast, and had required from the Turkish General in command that a certain railway should be blown up. The Turk was very willing; but, as he explained, he had no explosives—those could be supplied—but, as he went on to explain, he had nobody who understood the use of the French explosives—but that could be arranged also—but, he continued, how could a Frenchman come ashore amid so many of the enemy? Then the Turk was shown how his obvious desire could be met and—so the story runs—a Turkish uniform was provided, disguised in which a French officer carried out his own orders with the assistance of the Turks themselves.

So you may take it that the French were a very, very jolly lot in the Mediterranean, and it was a pleasure to go and dine with a Governor, just as it was always a marvellous experience to take lunch in

one of the little torpedo-boats and enjoy a meal which would put a London restaurant to shame, and was entirely produced by a stoker (in reality some stray *cordon bleu*, as the Frenchman would tell you with a wink) over a charcoal fire lit in a biscuit box on deck.

Our plans, however, were doomed to be changed. I was resting in my cabin on the upper deck at half-past two when I heard a tremendous explosion and saw a column of water rise not fifteen yards from the ship. I was not surprised, for I imagined it was just the first of the usual two or three shots from an ordinary Taube, to which during the last few months we had been getting quite accustomed. The first explosion, however, was followed quickly by two real smashers, neither of which, so far as I remember, hit the ship. I went to find Samson ; it was clear that something more than a mere aeroplane attack was in progress, and our minds turned to the battery, the presence of which the French had suspected some months before. I found the C.O. on the main deck quietly giving orders ; he was in no doubt about the source of the attack. Just as I reached him, a shell, which must have been the third or fourth, set fire to the hangar. Nothing now could prevent the ship from burning, and as further hits occurred, huge scarlet flames and masses of black smoke poured from the vessel. A few moments later the petrol store was hit and with it the fate of the ship was sealed. We were, of course, an actual " sitter " for the Turks. Direction and range offered no difficulty to their gunners ; they could see us and our position relative to the town and could measure us off to a millimetre, and shoot simply from the map.



Some minutes after the first attack a shot hit the whaler and swept it clean away ; the bow was left dangling from one davit like a leg of mutton. In the meantime " fire stations " had been sounded and the whole ship's company, except the crew of the twelve-pounder, was engaged in trying to quell the outbreak. The gun was manned in the perfectly vain hope that it might make some reply to the 6-inch Hows. which had us in hand. The rest of us meanwhile were very busy dragging hoses into the hangar with the intention of putting out the fire ; but flaming petrol is not extinguished with squirting water and it was soon clear that we were finished. We had steam, of course, and could have left the harbour, but what was the use of going to sea in a furnace with half a gale blowing, and the certainty, at the best, of having to beach the ship on the Turkish coast and lose all the crew ? Bitter as the decision was it was clearly the right one when the commanding officer ordered the quartermaster to pipe " Abandon ship."

In the meantime I was sent to the engine-room to see that there was no one left below ; others went forward to the " sick " bay, where some wounded were being attended to. One man, I remember, had the curious idea that the " sick bay " was a sort of sanctuary where, according to the rules of The Hague Convention, he was immune from enemy attack. He accordingly refused to budge.

As soon as the order was given the motor-boats were lowered and trips were started to the shore. Each man acted according to his temperament. Scores dived over the sides and swam ashore ; others behaved in the most leisurely manner. I recollect a very quiet

and shy individual, who was our head photographer, coming up to me just before the last boat left, asking " if I had any objection to his taking a few photographs." I need not say that he was given the necessary permission and secured some excellent views showing the ship burning.

In the meanwhile, the shelling was going merrily on, and for us sheltered by the deck-houses and general top-hamper of the ship it seemed a good deal safer to be on board than in the water. The French torpedo-boats had quickly got up steam and rushed out of the harbour, dodging the fire as best they could. The Admiral's yacht had escaped with a few stray hits, but of course none of these vessels were in flames as we were. The motor-boats took their passengers to the quay, which was protected by the hill from the guns ; scores of men swam to the cottages near by, but this shore was exposed to the full effect of the Turkish fire and the house from which the children had watched us with so much interest was often hit. However, well within an hour all our folk were landed and scattered over the town and hill. There were a few wounded and many without clothes. It began to rain in torrents, and as this downpour lasted until one o'clock the next morning, the misery of everyone may be pictured. When the last boat had gone there was still one man missing, Captain Clemson. A few of us went back to search for him, but in vain. We knew he had been assisting with the fire and we feared he was caught in the burning hangar. Not finding any trace of him in our search we were soon compelled to return, for our boat was being shelled heavily. Great was our delight later to learn that he had

been seen to jump from the ship and had swum ashore.

The Turks, who could see perfectly well everything that was going on, observing that they had destroyed the very unpopular *Ben-my-Chree*, now turned their attention to the town. Clearly they were trying to hit the wireless mast in the hope of cutting us off entirely from communication with the outer world. A thousand shells failed, however, to achieve what they desired.

As darkness fell, the scene was indeed remarkable ; the great ship slowly sinking in the harbour, sending up sheets of flame which the whole night long illuminated the town ; from time to time explosions, ranging from the tragic booming of the big bombs—for we carried 500-pounders in the hold—to the comic relief of thousands of rifle cartridges.

The effect of all this on the civil population was pitiful. Many had already fled to the hills despite the storm, but a great number, mostly women and children, still remained in their houses. What few men I saw were silent and went about listlessly with their heads bent, offering no help at all. Through many half-open doors could be seen groups of people simply gibbering with fear as the shells fell on the houses and knocked them into clouds of dust: In one doorway I saw an old blind man ; he was just sitting on the step muttering. I shook hands with him—it sounds absurd, but what else could I do to help or comfort him ?

Samson had ordered our men in the first place to rally behind a monastery some distance away, out of range of the guns. In the meantime, however, help

## LOSS OF THE " BEN-MY-CHREE " 151

was needed in the town. There was an improvised French hospital to which had been carried the now numerous casualties, including some of our own men. I received the order, therefore, to go to the monastery, get a volunteer ambulance party of twenty men and evacuate the wounded from the clearing station. I went off. The response to the request for volunteers was instantaneous. When we marched back to the town which the Turks were still shelling our orders were changed. The French Governor desired that we should join with a small force of his own, armed with formidable machine-guns of a big French pattern, and stationed a short distance away. We were to guard a beach where the Turks might attempt a landing, as it was generally thought that their bombardment of the ship was only the preliminary to an assault on the island. Accordingly, having found an empty house in which my men could be temporarily sheltered from the torrent of rain and light a fire to dry themselves, I went off to report to the Governor, Monsieur de Saint Salvy, and to secure arms for my party. The night was pitch black and the only light in the narrow lead-nowhere streets and escaliers was the bright amber glow from the ship, which was still producing, from time to time, loud bangs. The Governor's house was not very productive. We could only find four rifles and one bayonet. We therefore had to rely on the equipment of the men we were to join, and I was sent to an unknown post bearing the following order, conferring on me a proud authority.

" Pour toutes les dispositions de combat et de résistance vous êtes placés sous les ordres de l'officier Anglais.

" SAINT SALVY.

Soused and cold we stumbled up and down the tiny streets all in spate. Twenty minutes' walk brought us to our picket post. I could see nothing, so I had no idea what building we were entering, but through a small courtyard we took refuge in what turned out to be a tiny whitewashed church. The French N.C.O.'s treated me with a full measure of their native politeness, which was converted in a few days to much warmer feelings, implying on my side the greatest admiration for their devotion to duty. We sat down and drew up on a sheet of paper that was produced a roster of sentries, a list of positions for machine-guns and a catalogue of our supply of food. The senior N.C.O. and I then set out on a tour of inspection of the mile or so of coast surrounding the little bay where the landing was anticipated. We started with a scare ; lights were to be seen on the beach. A party was sent out hurriedly, but of course could find nothing.

Soon the rain stopp'd, the moon came out and the scene became worthy of the eternal beauty of the Mediterranean. I kept vigil all that night in the little church. I can see it now. It is a strange sight ; the floor covered with sleeping men in groaning, muttering heaps ; in the stalls, piled rifles, bayonets and bandoliers ; on the pews, great loaves of bread and tins of bully beef and jam ; overhead in the whitewashed vault a little lamp ; on the wall opposite a quaint picture of a saint on a horse, perhaps St. George, I cannot see very clearly ; at the other end the screen and altar ; the screen panelled and showing little painted saints ; in the centre a Madonna aureoled in gold looking very sweet and comforting in

the twinkling light of the lamp ; between us the stark outline of the huge machine-gun, mounted on its tripod ready for use.

With the next morning we started to get things a little more shipshape. I found I had in addition to my seventeen men, forty-six French sailors to command, and I can say that I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of my duties, which were officially described as being " Commandant le Detachement Franco-Britannique du Cimetière Turc, Castelorizo." My little kingdom gave me delightful occupation. First there were the elementary problems of sanitation, food and work. The French N.C.O.'s were excellent, but I had to lay down at once some strict regulations or our fort and its tiny courtyard would soon have become uninhabitable. The crux of the situation was that our church was a conspicuous object to the coast opposite, and would immediately have been destroyed had our presence in it been suspected. We, therefore, had to lie concealed by day, only appearing at nightfall to take up our machine-gun positions and perform our sentry-go round the coast. For the first two days we lived on bread and bully beef, and that cold, for we were afraid to light a fire in case the smoke should attract attention. But soon supplies began to come by means of a nightly *corvée*.

## CHAPTER XXI

### AN ADMIRABLE ORIGHTON

My batman, Stickell, turned up from nowhere in particular, and his energetic masterfulness was of a value not to be exaggerated.

I must say more about Stickell. He was really a character and I had been to no small trouble originally to secure his services. First as to his pedigree. He was one, I gathered, of a numerous family, blessed with a general longevity. I remember him showing me a faded photograph in which a mild-looking old lady in a silk dress was seated in the midst of an enormous group of persons, ranging from what appeared to be her collaterals down to what were clearly grandchildren or perhaps great-grandchildren, the group being evenly disposed over the surface of the photographic plate in the manner of a skilful picture of a country-house party. "That's the old lady," said Stickell, jerking his thumb in no particular direction, a very common and effective gesture of which he was a master. And then followed a heart-to-heart talk on Mothers in General during which we discovered that our views were practically identical. This confidence, however, only came after months of acquaintance; at first he was simply efficient. He

was a little man, I suppose nearly fifty years of age, careless, very dirty, seldom wearing anything resembling any known Army uniform, but he worked and organised and drove in a way I have rarely seen equalled. Buttons had no peace with him, the backs were as brightly polished as the fronts; Sam Brownes were his natural prey, every crevice a mirror, for he was a French polisher by instinct as well as by calling. When I once praised his treatment of my belt he replied with proud insistence, "Don't you never tell nobody 'ow I do it," and the secret died with our association.

He had his weaknesses. He would whistle and sing, especially in the morning, a habit I have always found a most trying one. He projected his face into yours when imparting information, and of course the word "sir" was not in his vocabulary. He had a cheerful self-confidence which I am sure was one of the secrets of his success. I remember once giving him particular instructions that I was to be called at some early hour. I was awake before the appointed time, and indignation was rising within me as minutes passed and it was clear that Stickell was going to be late. Presently I heard him approaching; he was whistling, that detestable habit. He entered the hut, cheerfully pushed his face into mine—I was lying against the wall, so had no sea-room to escape in—and remarked, "There, I've let you lay a long time this mornin', 'aven't I?"

Nothing ever put him out. The *clou* of all Stickell stories was that of his appearance in the Port Said Orderly Room whither he had been haled for some minor offence in our little community. Evidence was



given and the offence proved. Stickell, though plainly irked by the unaccustomed tunic and belt, was making obvious efforts to do his best to please. "What have you got to say?" inquired the commanding officer. "Well," said Stickell, and this was his great *mot*, "what I ses is this; there's only a few of us 'ere, let's live in 'armony!"

With his accustomed energy Stickell rapidly assumed a prominent place of command among the Frenchmen; true, he knew no French, but the N.C.O.'s were made to understand his will, and I think had a somewhat exaggerated idea of his position in the Army; of his position, that is to say, in rank, for no man could have an exaggerated idea of his capacity for useful work. He was a godsend in organising the sanitation of that church. Bits of loaves, half tins of jam, tiny hoards of biscuits were routed out daily, and I doubt whether the somewhat unprepossessing Greek priest, who visited us occasionally, had ever seen his place of worship in such condition of spotless cleanliness.

I adopted two schemes for trying to unify my mixed force. The first was an addition to the nightly parade. When arms had been inspected and everyone was ready to go, I had the picket dismissed by name, the Corporals of the French and English respectively calling out every man's name as he stepped out of the ranks. In this way we were soon on terms of pleasant intimacy, and incidentally Stickell's power was considerably extended as he was enabled to give his stentorian orders at a distance and directed with point to individuals.

The second expedient I was very proud of. It

consisted in French and English lessons in the most approved manner of modern pedagogy. This was a voluntary afternoon parade in the church—all our daily work was indoors for the reason I have given. The men sat round as they pleased, and by means of a series of objects, parts of the body, arms, clothing, gestures and movements, I endeavoured to impart a vocabulary to them; holding up my hand I would shout “la main,” nodding my head violently, “la tête,” and so on. The class had a *succès fou* and my short twenty-minute lesson was followed for the rest of the evening with amateur essays by both French and English, so that at the end of my command it might almost be said that the force was bi-lingual.

The first daily job was cleaning, rolling bedding, and putting the church generally into habitable condition. Then we carried out a short programme of physical exercises or arm semaphore. The rest of the morning was spent in instruction in the French machine-gun, a much heavier weapon than ours, more like a piece of ordnance than a rifle.

I soon moved out of the church into an attic in the shed in the yard and the N.C.O.'s lived in a stable below me. Luxuries began to arrive, a razor turned up from somewhere, a shaving glass, a table and a chair, all by way of offerings from different members of the party; which events greatly pleased me as showing that my measures were having a truly welding effect.

And so we settled down to days of rest or exercise and nights of watchfulness. I suppose I am sentimental, but I admit that the rounds at night never ceased to kindle in me a romantic glow. Our guard

was stretched around two small bays with houses scattered on the water's edge, but all abandoned. Here and there was a fishing-boat half-built, the skeleton members standing out clearly against the sky. A deserted factory with a huge rust-red fly-wheel and a half-built chimney provided one of our look-out posts and a suitable point for a machine-gun. Another gun was placed in a walled cemetery on a sort of rocky promontory. All night long I kept a vigil, as there was no one to relieve me, lying on a mattress (which had been produced from somewhere by an N.C.O.) with my head out of one of the empty window frames and one eye on the bay.

I have plenty of time for thought. The Corporal and guard return after investigating what seem like signals answered from the Turkish shore. What are they? Impossible to say. All the guard find is a lantern lit in an empty house. There are lights on the coast opposite. Our look-out, during the day, saw 150 camels going to the gun position from which the *Ben-my-Chree* had been shelled. Why? Will it be a landing or a bombardment or neither? These are the usual night fears mildly troubling the placid waters of the mind.

In any case, we were better off than the civilians. Their plight was shocking. They had fled to the hills and the vast majority refused to return to the shelter of the town. They were hidden behind rocks and were so jealous of every cranny of refuge that they never moved for a moment, for any purpose, from the air where they were wedged among their fellows. Two children were born; one death took place. The Governor had sent up tarpaulins for cover and the

doctor had done all in his power. It was truly heart-breaking.

This French doctor was a tiny little man, young, rather podgy, with a clipped moustache and bright, twinkling eyes, who had worked like a hero throughout the whole affair. He finally confirmed in me a belief long dormant but awakened when a cross-eyed, red-haired, pasty-faced Levantine steward was the first to volunteer for my ambulance party, namely, that the heroes of the world are not always the gay, smiling, debonair giants with fair curls. So fairly does nature distribute her gifts, charms to some, virtues to others.

Nearly every night during our stay was marked by sheets of rain. This was inconvenient, for at night time we were revictualled and any messages that had to come were sent over. On the fifth day I was the recipient of a wonderful letter full of rotund courtesies in which the Governor asked me for a nominal roll of my men. He feared that we might be recalled at any moment, for they had wirelessly (the Turks had missed the aerial after all in their bombardment) for a steamer to fetch us off. The Governor spoke of our "first line post," a reference which made me tingle a little with pride, for we had, in fact, been given the only beach where a landing was possible. At the same time I was invited to lunch. I added to my formal reply that my men had often wished to express their thanks to their brave comrades in arms and that one of the proudest incidents of my life had been to serve under the Governor and in our common cause—a nicely adjusted balance of compliments with which I was secretly pleased.

I met Samson at lunch, where I ate heartily—no false modesty about food ! I learned that 200 of our crew had been taken off some days before in a trawler from the opposite side of the island, leaving the Colonel with a small party to salve or destroy anything of value that remained in the ship. At tea-time I returned to the church in the daylight. This was, perhaps, a foolish proceeding, for the Turks observing it began to shell us and spent ten good projectiles on our neighbourhood.

The night that followed was one of the most tempestuous I have ever seen anywhere. The clouds came down close around our heads, the thunder shouted in both ears, and the lightning!—half a minute was needed after each flash before the pupil could readjust itself to sight. Our poor sentries were drenched the moment they took up their posts, and the tips of the bayonets began to glow like torches, a phenomenon that may be common, but which I had never seen before. To add to the misery, the wind blew into my attic and I was soaked and physically wretched. It was impossible to light a fire for fear of the Turks seeing the smoke, but somehow, with the assistance of the indefatigable Stickell, we all managed to get a little comfort.

When the rain ceased the night became as fair as it had been foul. The prospect assumed the guise of a stage setting ; the moon far too bright for a real moon ; the middle-distance rock effect, childish ; the stage lighting so roughly arranged as to make it obvious that the scenery had only two dimensions ; impression of depth none, especially in the painted canvas frame showing cottages and ruined Venetian



**VIEW OF CASTELORIZO HARBOUR.**

[Page 152]



castle which gives its name to the place ; in short, the view from my attic was one of the crudest scenic effects I have ever inspected.

Being, for the first time, in unfettered command of men, I did the best I could to put into practice a principle which I had seen badly neglected in Gallipoli, namely, the conservation of human energy. In the Peninsula, as I have remarked elsewhere, the Staff seemed ignorant and callous. To suggest that a man's energy was limited appeared to be a form of incipient insubordination, whereas, of course, on the men's strength depended not only all the military endeavour, but their very health, and this treasure should have been the object of the most thoughtful thrift. At Castelorizo we did no needless work.

The next few days, however, were devoted perforce to the production of dug-outs. The renewed shelling had made us very uncertain of Turkish intentions, and in any case it was our duty to provide ourselves with some protection in case the church should be destroyed. I discovered that the French sailors had great initiative and carried through little improvements of their own very cleverly. Moreover, they were charming in their conduct towards the British and I was glad in this new experience to confirm my life-long love of France. Having said so much, a faithful picture of the nightly inspection will not be misunderstood.

As regards our own men, they only had what arms had been given them. Few had complete uniforms, but the French had lent them many jumpers and caps, and Stickell had received, as a tribute to his self-acquired position, almost a complete outfit.

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The French, on the other hand, were straight from their ships and properly equipped. Their idea of smartness and precise staccato movement was only indifferently good, but our men, though ragged, did their best to imitate the "Guards" touch, with marked effect on their Allies. I say "marked effect" and it is true, but none the less nothing clouded the belief that the reasonableness of an order was the touchstone of its authority. I can still see my Second-Maitre, Bavard, calling his guard to attention.

BAVARD: "Fix bayonets!" (A partial response.)  
"Georges, didn't you hear me say 'Fix bayonets'?"

GEORGES (in a tone of mild remonstrance): "My dear Peter, you know perfectly well that my bayonet will not fit this rifle. I told you so when I was issued with it."

BAVARD: "Oh! Very well, then you are excused. Remainder," with commanding emphasis, "Fix bayonets!"

This on parade. But the men worked, showed initiative, energy, gratitude and comradeship none the less.

The remaining nights of our enforced sojourn produced worse storms than ever. Torrents roared down the hills. I trembled to think of the poor Greeks in the mountains, but it was of no use, they feared bombardment and refused to return. A walk through the town in the afternoon showed it to be a desert. My own feeling was that the Turks had abandoned their scheme for landing on the island and intended merely to prevent the use of the harbour. This they did effectively, and why should they aim at more? Why take an island they could not keep, or waste valuable ammunition to no purpose?

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE EVACUATION OF CASTELORIZO

A FEW days later we received very definite news of our probable departure. For this I was both glad and sorry. Glad, for we yearned to be back at our old work, if, indeed, we could get any more ships or seaplanes from home; and sorry because the more the Turks showed signs of fighting, the less we liked leaving the French in the lurch. One afternoon I climbed up into the charming little dining-room in the deserted house in the deserted street in the deserted town of which Saint Salvy was the Governor. He was furious, not at our departure, which he anticipated, but at the refusal of the French Government to send help. He thumped the table. How was he, with 200 Frenchmen, to hold the island against the Turkish forces? The Venetians had not been able to hold it. The Italians had not been willing to take it. How could he succeed where they had failed? Air attacks were beginning. It was with a heavy heart that we prepared to leave our friends.

As regards the "Turkish Cemetery" post, my international command, I felt that the disbandment of the Franco-Britannique detachment must be marked by a ceremony fitting to so significant an

incident in the War. I do not share the British dislike of emotional display and on this occasion felt no qualms or fear of ridicule, "the only weapon the English climate cannot rust," for the witnesses were to be Britons under my orders, and Frenchmen in sympathy with my ideas. Besides, I had the safeguard of bi-lingualism. Each man was to hear his gospel in his own tongue. The *ad hominem* appeal was possible in the highest degree.

Our last afternoon was marked by a moderate bombardment mainly aimed at the church, which made us very sorry that our big dug-out was not complete. When the Turks had finished, we had our supper, everyone in the high spirits which follow danger past. Then I paraded the French on one side of our little courtyard and lined up the English facing them. Next I gave the order "Fix bayonets," and my scenery was complete.

First I put our own men at their ease and cheered their hearts by the information that we were going. This liberated their feelings of gratitude to the French, on whose repeated kindnesses, and indeed they were many, I briefly dilated. What I had said so far was the blunt, rough, manly stuff, fashionable at a period when politicians were in the background and strong, silent men of action were the vogue.

Then with heightened emotion I turned to the Frenchmen. Here was a chance for art and sentiment.

DISCOURS DU COMMANDANT DU DETACHEMENT FRANCO-BRITANNIQUE PRONONCÉ A CASTELORIZO

"Messieurs les français: Nous avons reçu l'ordre de partir. Mais avant de vous quitter il y a quelque chose qu'il faut dire. Nous sommes venus parmi vous comme

## EVACUATION OF CASTELORIZO 165

des naufragés. Vous avez partagé avec nous votre table, votre logement, vos vêtements. Ah ! Mais vous avez fait mieux que ça ! ! Vous nous avez offert votre camaraderie. Je vous assure que nous en sommes reconnaissants. Nous ne l'oublierons jamais. Nous allons saluer nos camarades ; la belle France ; et la cause sacrée pour laquelle nous luttons ! ”

Then a sharp order, “ *Ben-my-Chree* Volunteers, Present Arms ! ” Instantly the motley crew of comic stokers and bakers and Greeks performed the said manœuvre to perfection. In reply Bavard sobbed out the same order and we became caught between hedges of rattling bayonets and immersed in bravos, hear-hears and tears ankle-deep. We emerged with three ringing cheers which surely the Turks must have heard, and swung off into the deserted town. We had sad hearts and the Frenchmen we left behind parted with us, I know, in real regret.

Up and down the little streets and we were on the quay, where the Governor met us and we went through, with even greater credit, considering that we were laden with parcels and bundles of every kind, our fine performance of presenting arms. The Governor addressed the men. He explained that he had wished to accompany them to the cliff on the distant part of the hill whence they were to embark, but that his duties to the wounded forbade it. He added some really touching words of gratitude in half-English, turning to me in an odd way, from time to time, for translations, and concluding with embraces which in the presence of my men I found embarrassing. Here were the few French officers who with 200 men would hold the island on our departure. No one was unconscious of their danger. In the harbour behind

our quaint party lay like a shrivelled corpse, the brown, blistered, riddled, gigantesque *Ben-my-Chree*. It was with sadness that we turned to march over the hills to our escape.

We were loaded, of course, with rations, stores and certain material evidence that what remained of the ship was incapable of serving the enemy. For instance, we had the breech-blocks of the guns. We scrambled along in the pitch dark past an improvised French A.A. position to a spot where we overlooked a small cove. All round us rose steeply the rocks, wainscoted with white foam. To get down we relied on a hand rope fixed among the boulders.

Some go down to a big stone standing out in the water ; others form a sort of living chain for passing down our not inconsiderable baggage. Below, a small dump is made, but the swell, which is two or three feet high, washes over it and the bundles are moved higher up. It seems impossible to embark our fifty men at such a spot. Our companions warn us that it cannot be done. On the mainland nearly opposite is a Turkish camp and a gun. At any moment the searchlight, turned for half-a-minute on our position, will reveal it and doom the enterprise. That the evacuation is carried out at all is entirely due to the colonel, who, standing on the rock giving commands in his own emphatic style of speech, forces the work through by sheer nerve energy. Presently, we hear a low whistle, apparently passing along the shore, and some reply made to it from a dark object gliding dead slow into the cove. It is the trawler *Paris 11* which is to take us away. A boat puts off ; one of the biggest of our men, a 6 ft. 4 in.

## EVACUATION OF CASTELORIZO 167

farmer from Scotland, stands on the rock, at times dry shod, at times waist deep in water, holding the coracle on the top of the swell, and two, three, four at a time we are rowed out to the trawler. The embarkation lasts three whole hours, but there is no mishap and by the next morning we are out of range of our enemies, bound for our base at Port Said.

After our return from Castelorizo, as the *Ben-my-Chree* was gone and the squadron looked like coming to an end, and as it was two years since I had left England, I decided to apply for leave. At the same time there returned a great part of the crew of the *Ben*, and we had as shipmates on our transport the survivors of the ill-fated *Perisvet*, sunk off Port Said as I have already narrated.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### DINING WITH THE OMDEH

BEFORE I leave finally my notes on the War in the Near East, let me set down some impressions of an uninstructed visitor. I had been to Egypt twelve years previously on the way home from the British and German Colonies in East Africa, but had seen only enough of it to whet the appetite.

The visit which was now concluding had lasted the best part of two years. Camp life is segregation, and does not necessarily afford the chance of learning much of the country in which the camp is situated. Add to this the national aloofness of the British and the failure of the higher authorities to profit by the opportunity for teaching the officers and men in Egypt something more than they could learn in a barracks at Chelsea, and it might be thought that things were not promising. On the other hand, we had some advantages over the tourist in dealing daily with native working parties, and even learning a little of the psychology of Abdul and Ali and Mahomet, finding out perhaps that their characters differ as ours do, and that there may be a flaw in the comfortable generalisation which classifies them all as "Niggers" and so simplifies ethnological intricacies for the Imperial-thinking home patriot.

I was very fortunate and very generously treated both by my commanding officers in the matter of leave, and by the British officials, for whose kindness and patience I shall be always grateful. Some opportunities came, for as Yeoman and Flying Officer I moved about a good deal; others were created. I can at least say this, that I seized them all greedily, and approached the study of a strange people and new conditions with unaffected sympathy and interest.

Major Brodie, who was second in command of our regiment, and was a very friendly student of native life, having become acquainted in some way with the Omdeh of a village near Mena, secured for some of us an invitation to visit that local magnate in his home. Six mounted officers followed by six mounted servants made a brave show as we arrived in the palm wood in the centre of which was the village and the Omdeh's residence.

The house was a curious mixture of a tumble-down hovel and a modern building. Set in a clearing in the wood, flanked by a birkah or pool, it made a fine landscape feature. These pools are picturesque, though the practice of the natives to use them for drainage as well as washing and cooking does not make them exactly a sanitary feature of the local scenery.

We were met at the entrance of the wood by several Gafirs, or village police, who are under the control of the Omdeh, but not paid. I have heard it said that all Omdehs incline to use the Gafirs a little too much as private servants, intended rather to set off their dignity, than to perform more useful public functions. Certainly these men, with the assistance of other willing hands, took our horses. Dismounting,



followed by our batmen we entered the gate of the Omdeh's courtyard.

Here the family of the Great Man were assembled to receive us, an uncle who had been a previous Omdeh (for there was great pride in the fact that the office had been in the family for several generations) and other friends, including a French-speaking Arab from Algiers who was very helpful in enabling us to carry on some sort of conversation. Soon we were bidden to the dining-room, where two feasts were being prepared, the first for us and the Omdeh and his uncle, and the second for our men, and, if there proved to be enough, for other of the visitors also. The room was furnished with some excellent linen, and the seats were a queer attempt at grandeur, but in the corner I remember seeing a sack of rubbish which someone, many months before, had forgotten to clear away.

Our host had very kindly provided knives and forks, but as he felt bound to attempt to use them himself, and his uncle followed suit, a difficult situation arose. These utensils were clearly not only otiose but embarrassing, and Major Brodie tactfully out-flanked the obstacle by setting to work on a fine fat capon with his fingers. We all copied him and the party was once more at ease.

I am afraid our young English friends cut a poor figure. They talked among themselves, and after dinner showed a tendency to wander into the ladies' part of the house, which caused much annoyance and some alarm to our host. Conversation was maintained chiefly by Major Brodie, who had mastered a series of Arab compliments, by means of which he conducted with the Omdeh a courteous antiphony.

I had a dictionary, but the most I could do was to repeat from time to time such phrases as—"This chandelier must have cost a lot of money," or "What an expensive rug that is," and so forth. The master of the house was profuse in reciprocal politeness, and begged us to come every day to our meals, and to bring a hundred friends—I am giving literally his invitation—which we smilingly promised to do. The dinner was good. The best products of the countryside, fresh and appetising, and a cake too, recalling rich German pastry. Nothing, to tell the truth, arrived at the table hot, for the servants bringing the dishes across the yard would pause to converse or argue with the waiting guests outside, and occasionally even lay down their load in order to enforce a dialectical point the more easily by gesture.

After dinner, which lasted, as will be understood, nearly two hours and a half, we went out and took some photographs of our host's party. We were shy at first, because we thought this might be an infringement of Mohammedan custom. However, no bones were made about it.

After our grooms had fed, as evening was coming on, we asked for our horses, mounted in the thronged public place, and rode away amid many kindly farewells given and taken.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A MUDIR AT WORK

AN experience which gave me an impression of the public spirit and potential administrative capacity of many Egyptians was a visit paid to the Mudir of Gharbia, Hassan Pasha Hassib. Hassan, whose early training was gained as an Inspector in the Department of Finance, was formerly Mudir of Zagazig and was distinguished as a practical, competent official, who at the beginning of the War, when many British troops were stationed in his neighbourhood, had been of great service. In company with an Englishman from the Ministry of the Interior I journeyed to Kafr el Zayat, where we were met by the Mudir and proceeded with him to the office of the local Mamour, which combined a police and a fire station. The Mamour was at the particular moment of our arrival engaged in a preliminary inquiry into a street row which had just occurred. He came forward to greet the Mudir, and if I had not already known it, I should have been made aware of his inferior position in the official hierarchy by the extreme subserviency of his demeanour. As a parliamentary hand I was interested to inspect the local Voters' Register, which is yearly made up by a special Commission, who strike

off the names of electors disqualified by misbehaviour. Election is secondary. A number of primary electors appoint their delegates, who in turn form a college to elect the member. Greeks, I was told, occasionally buy up these delegates and so control the election. Here was another pointed commentary on political problems which are often discussed and not altogether solved in more advanced lands. The army roll is not made up in the same way as the electoral, but from the Birth Register, which automatically matures so that the right class is summoned in the right year.

As Hassan wished to show us some of the institutions of his Mudiria we first had a look round Kafr el Zayat itself. Like all modern Egyptian towns, it is noticeable for the straightness of its streets, but only four metres has been allotted for their width. Except this planning nothing seems to be done to control the buildings, and ramshackle edifices very quickly arise in the neighbourhood of the cotton ginneries.

We commenced with a visit to a girls' school, where signs were not wanting that the emancipation of women is proceeding apace. The headmistress was a superior and intelligent lady, wearing no veil. The girls ranged from children to adolescents of thirteen. The school was very clean, and well built, although having the appearance of economical construction. All reformers in Egypt lay emphasis on the necessity for female education. The Pasha re-echoed what I had read in Lord Cromer's book; he went further, "We should close all boys' schools and have nothing but girls' schools. We should thus have a generation of good mothers." At this school no fees were charged, in order to appease, by a little

bribe, opposition to the education of women, about which there is still in the villages much indifference, or worse.

The next establishment we saw was the Government Technical School at Tanta. This is an institution on a much bigger scale than the girls' school and was erected about the year 1912. The building is in the form of a hollow square constructed round a mosque which ministers to the religious needs of the pupils. Here the demand for trade teaching is met to the full. We saw furniture shops, smithies, foundries and painters' shops all busily engaged. The work was well done, and the sound instinct of the Mudir insisted that the price of the finished products—for they were sold—should be kept at a commercial figure. At the time of my visit, however, the schools, prisons, and all such institutions were hard at work producing supplies for the Army. Hundreds of bombs had been manufactured at Tanta and an order was just being executed for 1,500 camel saddles. In order to increase the output some regular workmen had been employed in addition to the students, and, with his keen eye to administrative efficiency, the Mudir had detailed a police corporal to see that the level of energy was not lowered thereby.

The existence of the school is a tribute to the Provincial Council's public spirit, for it cost £12,000 voted from an Extraordinary Budget. As rating is on a voluntary basis the revenue of the Council is not a very attractive security on which to borrow money for public works, even though needed not for schools but for such immediate purposes as pumps and machinery connected with irrigation.

The third educational institution was the Tanta Orphanage ; a building with a fine exterior, though the inside, which was spotlessly clean, had evidently been finished with due regard to expense. We went round inspecting the bootmaking, leather work, and other industries carried on by the eighty orphans and were also shut in for half-an-hour to listen to the boys' brass band, which gave our host particular pleasure. Tanta also boasts of a Primary School for girls and the Ahmadi Mosque, the biggest educational establishment in the town.

So much for education ; now a word as to public health. During the day we were taken to see a large ophthalmic hospital, and walked round the out-patient ward. The object of this department, which is for adults, is the performance of small operations, dressings and the like, and we saw many out-patients sitting in rows, each provided with a proper case-sheet, and awaiting treatment.

An even more interesting undertaking was the Clinic at Tanta. The matron was a fine type of British trained nurse, brisk, efficient, with much charm of manner. She gave us some little account of the starting of the Clinic, which is intended principally for children. When it was first opened it was immediately besieged, the custodians being knocked down, and the patients swarming in through doors, windows and every other aperture. Even at the time of our visit there were two or three hundred cases treated each day, and a roster had been established so that everyone should be attended to in turn. The matron had trained three native women to do simple dressings, cleansings, and deal with minor ailments ; the great

underlying idea of the whole scheme being to imbue the children with a desire for personal cleanliness.

Next to the Clinic is a Midwifery School, under the control of an English nurse, who does district work with the help of pupils who come to her for training. Here a good deal of local prejudice had to be overcome, stirred up by the Mrs. Gamps of the neighbourhood ; in fact, in order to secure pupils they are paid to live in the home during the course of their training. Afterwards, when they go out into the villages, they are highly thought of, and no doubt much good will come from this enterprise. The Hospital at Tanta is also a Government institution ; it does not touch infectious cases, tumour and bilhartzia, contracted from the water, being the commonest diseases treated.

I was greatly interested to see the efforts that were being made in this most up-to-date province to protect and improve the health of the people. The death-rate in Egypt is much too high. I think I am right in saying it has averaged, during the past ten years, 30 per 1,000, as against 13 in England. In the large towns, such as the one of which I am speaking, Cairo, Alexandria, Assiut, Beni-Suef, and others, it rises as high as 39 per 1,000, and in some years in Cairo it has even reached 44. The urgency of the clinic and the midwifery centre is sufficiently emphasised by the fact that there has been an average of 300 infant deaths per year to every 1,000 born, while the general rate for children under sixteen is 77 per 1,000. This means that 28 per cent. of infants born die during the first year of life, while 48 per cent., or nearly half, die before they reach the age of sixteen.

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TO VIND  
ABSORPTION



TWO VIEWS OF THE DEFENCE POST AT THE GREEK CHURCH,  
CASTEL.ORIZO. [Page 166.

It may be thought that this is due to Egypt's hot climate, but such is by no means the case, in fact the blazing sun acts as a disinfectant. In the Suez Canal zone, which has been clear of fever since 1905, the death-rate has fallen to 19 per 1,000, and in some parts of the zone to less, while the infant death-rate has been reduced to figures more nearly commensurate with those of our own country.

I am speaking of conditions in the early part of the War. No doubt, since then, health has been greatly neglected in Egypt as it has been in England. The possibility therefore of setting up a Ministry of Health should be considered by Lord Milner's Commission. I am not quite clear why there is no Municipal Government in Cairo. The objection seems to be that if it existed it would become too powerful; but at least there should be a Public Health Authority, with the appointment of proper advisers. To extend to other Municipalities powers over Public Health may not be desirable. The danger is that a Municipality would be jealous of its reputation, and rather than admit that cases of infection had been found, would wait until the infection had spread to the neighbouring district, so that there should be some doubt as to its real origin. Extension of the Government powers touching health would seem in this case to be the real solution.

The inspection of the Police Station and the Fire Station at Tanta demonstrated the familiar efficiency of the Egyptians in matters of equipment. An Alexandria policeman, with every button and buckle resplendent, mounted on his chestnut cob, shining like burnished brass, is a sight that might turn even a Lifeguardsman green with envy. The mounted guards

at Abdin Palace, in their white-painted sentry boxes brilliant at every point, attain a real wedding-cake standard of ornamentality. An Italian was commandant of the Tanta Fire Station, and the firemen were mainly ex-policemen. Their engine was smartly turned out for our benefit, and I can well believe that they compare favourably with any fire brigade in the rapidity with which they execute orders. As a rule, however—especially in the villages—the fire has consumed everything before anyone has time to arrive. How could it be otherwise in a country where water is as precious as blood ?

The lighting of Tanta is supplied by a company and not too well done, but the Mudir is a progressive-minded man, and in other areas under his control had introduced municipal enterprise.

The end of the day brought us back to the Mudiria ; a fine building used for the Government of the Province as well as of the Municipality of Tanta. Here we could talk over our experiences. I was much struck by the increasing control exercised by the Egyptian officials over administration. Hassan Hassib evidently understood responsibility. His mind turned on efficiency, and he resented hotly the suggestion, for instance, that crime escaped unpunished. I felt that the second-class British official was gradually fading out of the picture. It is clear that the best kind of man, sympathetic, broad-minded and able, will be needed henceforward to play the difficult rôle required of an inspector. A few such are worth even a large number of second-rate performers.

It is worth while recording this capable Egyptian's opinion on finance. He was greatly opposed to any

increase of taxation ; his specific was the reform of the Religious Trusts. Wherever property was mis-managed he thought it would be found the Trusts were to do with it.

Before I leave the question of administration let me touch for a moment on the Public Works Department.

Under the guidance of one of the Irrigation Engineers I drove via the Barrage up the famous Rayah Menufia to Shebin-el-Kom, Quesna, Benha, Tukh, Qaliub and Shubra. The period was the five days during which this area was drawing its water supply. The first striking thing was the teeming population of humans and animals ; every field one might almost say crowded with men, boys, girls, buffaloes, goats and dogs ; not many women, most of them, I assume, being busy with household duties. Every inch of the land appeared to be cultivated, and everywhere was work, work, work. I smiled as I thought of the ignorant comment I had so often heard in camp about the " lazy niggers." Hardly a man turned to pay any attention to us, although my guide was a popular, and evidently influential, figure, for grave and polite respect was extended to him by the cultivators with whom we stopped to converse. Every few hundred yards of the Canal were men or boys twisting artesian water screws to lift the precious fluid to the fields.

I can conceive no way of impressing so clearly on the mind the conviction that water is the life-blood of Egypt. Disputes about water are the chief origin of what crime there is in the country. I understand that the Government is only responsible for the distribution of the supply to the large areas, but are proposing to

extend their realm so as to control the irrigation down to a 500 acre unit. Cotton is naturally their first care, and what water is over may be used for rice. As monopolists of the arterial system they naturally have complete power over the commerce of the country. The strict justice of the method of distribution of water is the best object lesson the Egyptian can have of the benefits conferred on the country by British administration. I said British administration, and it is, of course, true that under British protection the fine old system inaugurated by Mehemet Ali was rescued and developed, but it must not be forgotten that the head of the Public Works Department in the year of which I am writing was Sir Ismail Sirri Pasha, a most eminent Egyptian engineer.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A COPTIC WEDDING

I WAS privileged one day to be invited as the only English guest to the wedding of the daughter of a wealthy Copt. I am afraid I treated the invitation rather as if it had been for a similar function at home, for I attended late, and was grieved to find that the ceremony had been held up for a short time in the hope that I should be punctual. The whole of the road in front of the bride's house was occupied by a large marquee, and I may remark, in passing, that this practice of letting parts of the public streets for temporary purposes is a source of revenue to the municipal authorities in the large cities of Egypt. The marquee was full, and seemed very dark as I plunged in from the bright sunshine. In a crowded setting of guests was the inner circle consisting of choir-boys, all dressed like little Popes with mitres or jewelled birettas of scarlet. What light there was came from many candles held by the singers and from other candles illuminating a big table on which was a large volume of Scripture, magnificently bound in silver. The choir-boys were led in their singing by two professional cantors who were blind, and whose melody did not commend itself to my occidental

taste. There were two bishops officiating ; men of great distinction and commanding presence ; tall, upstanding figures whose thick black beards fell to their breasts from their impressive countenances. One bishop was reading the Scripture when I arrived, and the other was expending a good deal of attention in pulling, from time to time, the coat tails of his colleague, who appeared frequently to go wrong, and keeping him generally in the right line of the ceremony. His Lordship then turned to me with great courtesy, and entered into conversation, somewhat to my surprise, for I was overcome with awe, and sitting mouse-like still, feeling guilty for my lateness. The bishop held a brilliantly jewelled orb surmounted by a cross, and he filled up the leisure the service afforded by showing me how the stem of it unscrewed, and directing my attention to the beauties of its workmanship.

The bride sat in her chair, and, covered with her veil, "looked charming," as the newspaper phrase goes. The happy pair both wore embroidered white satin gowns, and had crowns on their heads. After the religious ceremony, a speech was made by a friend of the family, the choristers and cantors disappeared, and the formal proceedings were at an end.

My host graciously asked me whether I would wish to go into the ladies' apartments to see the festivities which were in progress. I replied in the affirmative without fully realising that with the Copts the segregation of women is carried almost as far as with Mohammedans. However, I was reassured, for I had as my guide a son of the house, a young

engineer, and together we pushed into a neighbouring building, packed to the doors with the lady guests ranging in complexion from fairish women with flaxen hair which suggested art, down to coal-black relatives from the country. The entertainment was being provided by a troop of Cairene dancing women. My only compatriot present was the governess to my host's children, and with this lady I had a most illuminating conversation. I imagine few people had had a better opportunity of understanding the mind of Egyptian women. Among other notabilia, I remember she told me how passionately they desire a fair complexion, and what a ready market there is here for any preparations of the *Institut de Beauté* which promise to gratify their passion.

After this entertainment, I was invited to sit down with my host and his friends to a most excellent supper where we disrupted several of the best fowls I ever tasted, all the good work being done with our fingers. After the chief guests had feasted, there was to be a second repast for humbler friends of the family.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT AND VOLUNTARY RATES

HIDDAYA BEY was the Governor of Port Said in 1916, and under his guidance Colonel Malone and I spent a pleasant day seeing something of municipal administration in Egypt. The Bey lived in an imposing Palace on the Plage, which is equal in beauty and extent to more-visited seaside resorts in France. Though our host was an Egyptian proper, of the fellaheen in origin, his table lacked nothing the West could suggest or provide, and the luncheon was the best I tasted for two years. The conversation, conducted in French, covered naturally a good deal of ground, and I can remember Hiddaya's alarm at the prospect of the Russians taking Constantinople, and his hope that at the worst some form of neutralisation might be resorted to.

Bent on being instructed, we directed the talk as far as possible into the channels of municipal administration. The Governor spoke in an advanced manner of all these matters, but his ideals somewhat overleapt the realities, for his town contained crumbling and derelict houses, and streets here and there littered with garbage. Indeed, we had been told of a public herd of swine which was to take the place of the dust-

cart. No doubt the municipality is weak in many ways. To fix nothing except the street lines and the height of houses is little enough power for a housing authority to possess. Voluntary rates do not form an impressive foundation for administrative efficiency.

The control of the Sanitary Department is divided between Cairo and the town, the Chief Officer being appointed centrally and the actual cleaning staff engaged locally. The show piece was the Sewage Farm, and most of our conversation concerned the matter of drainage. Under the old system the cess-pools and fosses were emptied by private enterprise, and I was amazed to be told—I do not know whether it was accurate—that the municipality, as sanitary authority, had no power to complain unless these fosses actually overflowed. So it can well be imagined that a nuisance must indeed have been a nuisance before action could be taken. I need not explain in great detail how the new system of water drainage is to work, but I may say that air pressure has to be employed to raise the sewage to the required level. Gravity will not do, as only four feet below the surface of the town a water-soaked stratum is reached. It is not generally known that the Palace of Westminster is drained in a somewhat similar way.

A great deal is learned by the student of sociology in these backward communities ; just as in the creation of vast new settlements of men in military camps, springing up from nothing, the observer continually encounters primitive obstacles to circumvent which the general laws of societies have been called into being. We hear a good deal nowadays of the evils of nationalisation, and there may be some who would

admire the voluntary rating system of Egypt. Here in Port Said it prevailed and the ratepayers showed the initiative that is naturally associated with voluntary effort, for it was they who had started and carried through the drainage reform. But the other side of the picture is discouraging to the partisan of *laissez-faire*. Drainage is intended to protect public health. Were the non-ratepayers to be allowed to carry on in the old way to the public danger? This dilemma was only partially met. A licence was to be issued to those who wished to use the system. The ratepayers would be licensed free and the others made to pay heavily. But even this compromise could not disguise the failure of the voluntary system.

Explanations of these municipal activities enlightened by personal visits filled a strenuous afternoon. We reciprocated Hiddaya's courtesy by an invitation that he should visit the air station, which he was constrained to accept, although with ill-disguised fear that he would be forced to make an ascent. However, by repeated assurances on this score his anxiety was overcome, and I think the Governor was a little touched by the trouble we took in turning out the guard, and in other ways to do him honour suitable to his station.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### AN EGYPTIAN GENTLEMAN'S OPINIONS

WE have heard a good deal of the lessons of the War, and it has seemed to me that those at home are rather apt merely to seek support for their pet ideas and substantiation for their theories in what has happened, without examining with care the real effect on the minds of our five million or more soldiers of their experiences of many men and many countries.

Of one thing I feel fairly certain, that for many people the War has explained what is meant by the International and has led them to examine how far it does or should exist. Perhaps when we of this planet have all to unite against the Martians we may realise the ideal of human solidarity; rich and poor, high and low, east and west, north and south, as one. But that time is not yet. For the present men are divided into classes by natural sympathies, and the question is, In what direction do those sympathies extend? There are those who think that Frenchmen, for instance, are bound to be united in feeling with Frenchmen and Germans with Germans, whatever the social class in each case. That is the national or top-to-bottom classification. The belief in it was by far the most widely prevailing before the War.

The reverse opinion, which is that French and

German workmen as workmen and the French and German "quality" as "quality" are the true divisions, makes the side-to-side classification. Which corresponds with the fact? To use the language of the geologist, is the formation of mankind a national cleavage or a class stratification? The decision in this matter is, of course, a fundamental decision and will determine policy both in home and foreign affairs.

Before the War, though I had been abroad a good deal, I accepted the national view, but much that I saw during the War impressed me with the truth of the International. I say "truth" because I am not discussing so much whether people ought to love their nationals more than their classmates, as whether in fact they do so.

Let me refer to the case of the captive Turkish General. He had been taken at the head of his men, but as a prisoner he was, of course, separately lodged. His men, though well-treated, were troublesome to our guards, and our Commandant decided to consult the General on the matter. Now which sympathy was the stronger in the General's mind? Class or national? On this point his advice left no one in doubt. "Why don't you beat them," that was his suggestion. He was dealing as between gentlemen, and acted as a gentleman should in giving an honest and helpful opinion. Here was the International with a vengeance.

I attribute to this stratification the respect felt for the Turk by many Britons. He is always spoken of as "a gentleman." No one ever says the Armenian is a "gentleman" or the Greek is a "gentleman."

## AN EGYPTIAN GENTLEMAN'S OPINIONS 189

They are not "gentlemen." They are the lower and middle classes of the Mediterranean. The Turk is the squire, and therefore as mankind is grouped truly in social layers and not in nations our upper class says the Turk is a good fellow and the Armenian and Greek are vermin.

Assuming for a moment that what I have said is true, and that class sympathies are international, there is new light on familiar home topics to be got from conversing with the stranger; for we may find in his way of regarding his problem an explanation of the way in which his counterpart regards similar problems at home. To see one's face in the glass, to hear one's voice in a gramophone, are methods of self-education; a fresh note is struck when familiar views are heard from an unfamiliar source. And this is true whether we sympathise with the views or not. That at least is the conclusion I came to from a long afternoon spent with a distinguished Egyptian politician.

First let me describe him and his dwelling. He was the squire of a village on the outskirts of Cairo. Indeed the fine modern streets of the capital were gradually overtaking and swallowing up the miserable slum which formed his estate. It is the characteristic of British country houses to be remote from the community they overshadow socially, but in Egypt, as in Italy, the local lord often lives in the very centre of his people, and the huts and hovels of the village leaned right up against the walls of my friend's palace. We entered by an imposing stone gateway, and on the right passed a mosque, an integral part of the house, recalling the alliance between parson and

squire at home. For my host had a sect of his own, and its special worship had its centre here. Now as to the dwelling. Parts of the place were old, parts were in modern Arabian style, but many of the rooms were frank imitations of a Western residence, and not very good imitations either. The walls of the dining-room, I recollect, were plaster painted to represent oak panelling, an effect depressing in the extreme. I remember, too, a very expensive modern lavatory, with beautiful porcelain bowls and silver taps, but I fancy that it was not connected in any way either with water supply or with drainage; in fact, it was no more than a costly ornament. However, these were only outward and visible signs of the squire's desire to live up to Western ideals.

Years ago I believe the prosperity of the estate had been threatened by a lawsuit of the Khedive's, and a sufficiently strong love of equity was only inspired in the judges by the presence of the British Agent. Thus fortified in spirit against their fear of the ruler, they gave a just decision and saved our friend's fortune. This example of fair play confirmed him in his love of the British. In fact, he was a grateful partisan of our country almost to an embarrassing degree. We were received with Oriental courtesy and Oriental prodigality of entertainment. Unfortunately, our host could not speak English, but talked in Arabic or by means of scraps of not very intelligible French. He opened on the familiar topic: our rule in Egypt had been an incomparable blessing. Before the British arrived, "We ourselves, our houses, our wives, everything belonged to the Khedive. We could not put our head out of the door

## AN EGYPTIAN GENTLEMAN'S OPINIONS 191

but a Turk hit it." That was clearly true, and the squire had the best possible evidence of British determination to bring it to an end. He continued. More firmness was required. I was a member of Parliament (he had no idea of what party), I should know that much harm had been done by Liberal views. What Egypt required was great strength; an exhibition of overwhelming authority. Mr. Gladstone had done damage. The argument was vigorously clenched, "Moses came to Egypt with a stick." I was beginning to get a little disturbed, because here in conversation with a man who knew the country so well, views I cherished were being roughly handled.

We passed on to discuss the land taxes. I would observe in passing that, inasmuch as the irrigated land and the resources of Egypt are synonymous, and as the taxes are imposed on and graduated with strict regard to the amount of wealth created by Government irrigation, it would be hard to see on what fairer basis taxation could possibly exist. Oh, yes, our host was in favour of the land taxes, and would support an increase of the same, but the money should be spent for the benefit of the people who paid the taxes. More should be done for the landowners; to talk of spending the money for education was absurd. Let the customs duties be increased; that would provide all that could reasonably be expected for the education of the people. I began to feel more reassured. It was all an echo of familiar Parliamentary debates. Was the Income Tax to bear the new burden or should something be put on sugar and tea?



What about Parliament ? A Free Parliament did not really represent the people, and would not for a hundred years to come. The Lower House only stirred up trouble ; created agitation and talk ; you never heard such torrents of chatter ; everything in the universe discussed, and no one ever sticking to the point. I seemed to have heard all this somewhere before. Surely we ourselves had debated the relative merits of an elected and a hereditary chamber.

Well, what about the Provincial Council which I think everyone agrees has proved to be the most useful part of the Egyptian Constitution ? What did my host think ? What use was a Provincial Council to the Mudir ? Far better leave him alone without being bothered. It was foolish to hamper the expert with amateur interference. And another point : nowadays they let anyone on to the Council ; the man of good family had ceased to hold the position to which he was justly entitled.

Who were all these Mudirs that were being appointed ? The sons of donkeymen. It was a great mistake to put such men into responsible public positions. They could not possibly command the respect of the common people.

And then again, officers for the Army ? If there was one class of service it was necessary to reserve for " gentlemen " it was service in commissioned rank. The work they were called upon to do necessitated them having a social standing which marked them off clearly from the proletariat. I wonder what the exponent of this same view at home thinks of the idea as interpreted by an Egyptian. What is his opinion of the fighting qualities, for instance, of the

## AN EGYPTIAN GENTLEMAN'S OPINIONS 193

Egyptian officer as compared with the Soudanese battalions who, whatever their claims may be, can certainly lay no claim to be "gentlemen"? "Stock tells," was the point with my Pasha friend. It is no uncommon argument in our own politics. Is it any more true here than there?

We passed on pleasantly to speak of education, and here I am bound to say I think my host held broader views than some senior officers with whom, in their expansive moments, it was my privilege to discuss the same subject. I will give one gem verbatim. "I may be old-fashioned, but I admit freely that I think nowadays we have a good deal too much of this so-called education." The author of that crystal, an experienced colonel, was about half-a-generation behind this old Moslem Tory who merely thought the higher schools were useless. What was required was not to teach children all these high-falutin' subjects, but something that would be really useful to them. It was a mistake to send boys to Europe; the "educated" young man only wanted to get on, wanted a Government job, was ashamed of his father's trade, would not do what was practical; that is, would not submit to taxation, and go for a soldier. Therefore the system must be unsound.

I hope I have done no injustice to my patriotic and benevolent host. His comments on nepotism in the public service; on the unnecessary extension of Government employment; on the necessity for politicians serving with a single eye to the public advantage, and the efficiency of their department, could not have been bettered as a criticism of affairs in England to-day. His views on the Capitulations

were, need I say, convincing? It is impossible to govern a country where every nation has privileges of its own.

I left the Pasha with regret, for I was filled with real respect for him. He was a patriot of the patriots; prepared to put his Anglophile professions into practice. Why had no Egyptian force been raised for the War? He had offered his own services, and I am sure would have served gallantly in defence of Egypt and in aid of the country to which he owed so much, and of which he was so ardent and grateful—even if sometimes so indiscreet—a partisan.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### BRITISH OFFICIALS IN EGYPT

IN Egypt, many, of course, were the stories we heard of Lord Kitchener, and it was very striking how his fame persisted among the natives. One day desiring to go to the Residency at Cairo, I was trying to explain my wish to a cabman. Nothing made him understand, and I felt utterly at a loss, until someone who was helping me—and everyone was always willing to help—told the man to drive to “Kitchener-Beit,” i.e., Kitchener’s House. He was off like a shot. He knew perfectly well then what was wanted. I can understand how Lord Kitchener’s sense of humour stood him in good stead in ruling Egypt. “You can travel through darkest Africa with a smile,” was the saying of no neophyte, and we never found a native who failed to respond to a humorous gambit in conversation.

I heard one amusing story of the campaign to teach saving habits. Lord Kitchener wanted the people to economise. The mudirs—call them Chairmen of the County Councils—were to institute Savings Banks in all the provinces, and a thrift sermon was prepared, turned into fine Arabic, and circulated for use in the mosques. The tax-collectors, being Christians, had

to wait outside. As the people emerged, having heard the sermon, they handed in their two, five or ten piastres, replying to the thanks of the collectors, "You are very welcome." Some Mayors even borrowed at 10 per cent. in order to provide money. The explanation was that everyone supposed this to be a special tax which, for some no doubt good reason, Lord Kitchener wished to impose on them, veiled in the pleasant guise of thrift; and none were more surprised than they to find that their money remained their own, and, moreover, was bearing interest. This story, which I believe is quite true, throws an interesting light on the ill-feeling caused during the rising in Egypt by the collections for Flag Days and other charitable funds. No doubt some Omdehs, rather losing sight of the benevolent intentions of the collections and determined that their villages should not be behind others, stimulated charity by means familiar to them, rather on the old French model "*Fraternité ou la mort*," which was paraphrased as "*Sois mon frère ou je te tue*." In such circumstances it cannot be said with certainty that the offering blessed alike him that gave and him that took.

No one could pass even the shortest time in Egypt without becoming impressed by the ability and character of the British officials and the value of their work in the country. The inspector setting a Western standard of incorruptibility and honour protects the fellah from many a little tyrant of the fields who would oppress him. A high official told me, speaking of the land tax, "I have travelled 200 miles to inspect one acre." The real complaint against the Chamber is that

it is composed largely of landowners, who put their own interest first. Though this may be so, I should like to say in passing that it appears to me to afford no excuse for robbing Egypt of Constitutional Government.

One criticism I will venture to make of our bureaucracy. I thought some of them were living too much on the past, looking back on Lord Cromer's day—truly a great record—and not seeing the present needs of public health and education. It is not creditable that there has been so small a yearly increase in the education vote. To have made Egypt solvent was a great thing, but there is more to be done than that.

There is another point. Is it a good plan that so many of the diplomatic officials should just drift in, as it were, from Tokyo or Madrid or Buenos Aires, and be forced to carry on without any special knowledge of the complicated conditions and chameleon nuances of Egyptian politics. The great administrators have had lifelong associations with the Protectorate. Lord Kitchener, for instance, was actually surveying Palestine in the 'seventies. And I would go farther. Is the treatment of the Egyptian notables sufficiently sympathetic and intimate? Even suppose their character bears the blemishes referred to in "superior" terms by Lord Cromer, they are sensitive and quick to apprehend a slight. Officials who cannot speak Arabic are handicapped, and the case is not bettered by our national habit of exclusion. Is it possible to keep really well in touch with Egyptian opinion if relations are only those of Adviser and Minister—let us say Tutor and Pupil. Women play a large part in the West in the art of government.

It is to be assumed that their power is no less strong in the East. But what influence have we on Egyptian ladies? Do the wives of the British visit them, as they should, as they would were the husbands friends and not merely officials unequally yoked? I believe I am right in thinking that British power is not strengthened nor the blessings of British efficiency and honesty spread by this universal practice of social amputation.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### GETTING " WINGS "

WHEN I arrived home after two years' absence in the near East I found that politics had become very interesting. The Second Coalition had lasted much longer than its critics thought possible, but there were still many difficulties ahead of it. However, I saw no reason to alter my original decision to remain on active service until the end of the War, and on that account declined a second offer which was generously made by the Prime Minister for me to join his Government.

I devoted the first few weeks of my stay to a visiting tour of English aerodromes and aeroplane factories and learned with satisfaction of the arrangements made by the Ministry of Munitions for increasing the supply of material. My own experience at the station at Port Said had made me very anxious to do something, if possible, to quicken the flow of new machines, for anything new we rarely saw, most of our supplies being second-hand, some having even done service in the Mesopotamian desert. Up to this point I had had no experience of aviation from the Army standpoint. The Navy, however, I had found far too apt to regard the seaplane as a sort of ship which, with suitable repairs and maintenance, would go on, although



obsolescent, for many years, only needing new supplies of bombs, petrol and ammunition. This, of course, is a complete misconception. Aircraft are in the nature of shells or torpedoes, in fact expendible munitions.

I need not say that it was of the greatest value to me to become acquainted with the latest productions at home and to see the many new inventions and designs, some of which, even at the end of the War, had not been developed to the point of practised use. I had determined also, while at home, to qualify as a pilot. I was well aware that a pilot of forty-one would be of little use for war service, but I held the view, which I think is now a part of the official policy of the Ministry, that everybody who goes aloft should be able to fly. Although I belonged to the military side there was no hope of being trained by the Flying Corps unless I was willing to join a squadron as an ordinary pilot. This I had no desire to do. In point of fact, within two hours of my arrival in London, I had been offered employment by Commodore Sueter, who was forming a staff in connection with that interesting project known as the Adriatic Barrage, of which I shall say more in a moment. There was just time between April and the end of May, when I was to start, to acquire the coveted "wings." An application to Commodore Paine was promptly dealt with and within a few days I found myself at the Calshot Air Station engaged in the daily routine of the "quirk."

Details of life under instruction I will not inflict on the patient reader. Suffice it to say that I fell into the class technically known as "the World's Worst Crashers," made my first solo flight on April 28th, and on June 15th had completed enough solo flying to pass



TO THE  
ABORIGINAL

me out and secure the brevet. The tale of my mistakes and the record of my painful acquirements have no interest except perhaps for the taxpayer who had to meet the charge of no fewer than five machines injured or destroyed.

However, the experience, I had with the "America" boats was valuable. Even from the H.12, which was the pattern in use in those days, the least imaginative might gain some notion of the untold possibilities not only of this type of aircraft but of the big machine in general. It was at Calshot, where Commander Bigsworth, D.S.O., had organised a most efficient Channel patrol, that I got my first bias towards the multi-engine machine; and afterwards, under the influence of Caproni in Italy, this partisanship became a definite part of my aerial faith. The "America" was a covered-in vehicle with something approaching real accommodation and showed the practicability of carrying into the air the protection from the weather necessary for scientific apparatus and for the making of those calculations without which real navigation will never be possible. Whilst dealing with the "big v. little machine" question, I may perhaps say a word about the influence of the scout pilot and stunt flyer generally, on the development of air work. I believe, in the early days, it was the custom to select pilots, where possible, from cavalry regiments. This was because "good hands" are required for both reins and joysticks. With a small machine the slightest touch, the faintest inclination makes all the difference. A scout pilot, therefore, is a man who is naturally proud of his skill. He is the very man to develop fighting tactics for the mosquito craft of the

air. I would never say a word in derogation of these wonderful duellists. I saw enough of Barker, V.C., to realise not only how much their personal skill is worth to the fighting efficiency of a squadron, but how much their enthusiasm for the air has to do with maintaining the *morale* of a flying force. Psychology in flying is everything. Courage is required in land and sea warfare. But there, the constant presence of companions makes a great difference. There is the reciprocation of example and all the advantages (and, of course, all the drawbacks) of mob-psychology to be taken into account. The air is different; it is solo work all the time. Even in the two-seater, the pilot in control of the machine has really to decide, without consultation with his observer, what is to be done, and the observer likewise has his own decisions to make. Thus it is that a very high level of determination is needed, and the spirit of an air squadron is of ten times the importance of the *matériel*. Perhaps later, in the big machines carrying 50 or 100 combatants, the other factors will reappear, but at present everything depends on the nerve of the individual. So much to make it clear that I do not fail to appreciate what courage counts for.

But it was made equally clear to me that this love of flying as an art is hostile to the love of flying as a science. The high-browed "X-chaser" or "slide-rule merchant," using again the jargon of the Mess, did not get into the air half enough. One of the troubles was that he could not fly. Even if he could fly he was probably a "champion crasher." All this the new rules will obviate, but in the past it meant that sciencetoiled on the ground while art revelled in the air.

What was the result; the effect on ideas? Most people can think of an idea which, if it were suitable for the air, would advance greatly the cause of aviation; but the point always is, Is it suitable for the air? is the weight too great? do the conditions render an otherwise good scheme impracticable? Such questions can only be answered by experience, and it is here precisely that the difficulty occurs. The artist monopolises the air. He has no use for "gadgets." To begin with, they weigh a good deal. Next, they involve distracting his attention from the mere art of flying, and thirdly, even if they succeed it is a triumph for mechanical science and *pro tanto* a setback to art. It is exactly as if you were to offer to Inman a mechanical cue by which he could score breaks without ceasing.

The slow progress made with wireless telegraphy, the state of infancy in which aerial gunnery finds itself, the contempt early in the War for the bomb-sight, the failure to use much excellent mechanical equipment which was actually sent out, the absence, even to-day, of effective means of communication between the pilot and passenger, all these things are the direct fruit of pure artistry in flying, and of making the wireless officers, the gunners, the bombing officers and the mechanics generally, mere groundlings. In the big machine there is room for specialists, room for apparatus, time for thought, opportunity for observation, all of which are lacking in the scout or two-seater. It was considerations of this kind which early converted me to a faith which will yet become the pattern of orthodoxy.

My final farewell to Calshot was a very pleasant one.

My jolly companions there having ascertained the shape, size and colour of the ship on which I was outward bound from Southampton Water brought out their picket boat and in the twilight bellowed through a megaphone such tender farewells as would cause even a Parliamentary candidate to blush. After which, as it was getting dark, they sent up showers of Verey lights, worthy of the S.O.S. of a comet. My fellow passengers were somewhat surprised, but I did not correct the impression which I think they formed that I had been in command of this important air station, and my heart certainly warmed to my kindly instructors and fellow quirks who thus sped me on my way to Taranto and the Adriatic Barrage.

## CHAPTER XXX

### AIRCRAFT v. SUBMARINES

No man could have been a better Chief than Commodore Sueter, expert in the submarine, the aeroplane, the airship and the tank ; and there are few men to whom the Air Service and the nation owe so much ; for the credit of many inventions adorns his record of achievement. He was the apostle of the application of mechanical science to warfare, the realisation of the need for which was the first step in the Allies' victory. How slowly this lesson of machinery was learnt and how soon it is being forgotten ! It means, if it means anything, that to-morrow will be different from to-day. I suppose a militarist is naturally a stupid person, or surely he would realise in his fervid preparations for the " next war " that it will be progressive science that will win and not mere repetition of the obsolete. What form the inventions will take no man can say, but it is clear that such precautions as heaping up masses of the present form of war material are of no more use than would have been an attempt by our eager compatriots of 1066, seeing the marked superiority of the Norman archers, to start an enormous national reserve of bows and arrows against the world conflict of 1914. This lack of pro-



gressive thought is familiar to all the five million men who have fought. Everyone has seen it in operation. "Is it in the drill book?" "Has it been done before?" "Shall I risk criticisms by my superior?" These are the questions asked, and not "Is it in itself good?" It is a mental digging oneself in. I remember an energetic pilot producing a whole drill properly worked out for launching a seaplane, another concocting with infinite toil a curriculum of training for observers. Neither got any thanks. Observers and seaplanes had not a place in the code, and even if they had had a place, correct manœuvres would have been decided and put far beyond the hope of modification long before the War came to show what was needed or useful.

But we have arrived at Taranto and the Adriatic Barrage. Of the scheme in which we were engaged I need not say very much. A glance at the map will show that the Adriatic is in the form of a bottle and that the neck lies somewhere between Otranto and the Albanian coast. The Barrage plan was by means of drifters, nets and—and this was our part—seaplanes, to make it impossible for the Austrian submarines, based on Cattaro inside the bottle, to pass the Barrage in the neck and reach the Mediterranean. That we succeeded fully I cannot say. The chief of the difficulties was the lack of suitable aircraft. Unquestionably, a constant patrol across these narrow waters would have made the passage of submarines impossible and with a sufficiency of machines our object should have been achieved.

The seaplane is far superior as a means of suppressing submarine piracy to either the towed balloon

or, of course, the man-lifting kite. Its value compared with the airship is more a matter of dispute, but the higher speeds it attains and its relative invisibility are strong points in its favour. On the other hand, the power of remaining in the air for long periods is the great argument for the airship submarine scout.

In any case it should be remembered that there are several methods of destroying the submarine. The picturesque method, the dream of the coast patrol pilot, is to catch the enemy on the surface or diving and neatly plant a bomb; after which the bubbles and large patches of oil are a mark of the airman's victory and an augury of the coveted decoration. Such success, however, crowns the work of the patrol rarely enough. More often there is engine failure and a perilous descent many miles to sea with the offchance only of being picked up. Tedium punctuated by disaster is a fair description of the work done by the flying boats round our coasts.

But there is another scheme effective against the submarine. Her capacity for under-water cruising is very limited. If therefore you can create a wide belt of the ocean in which she dare not rise, and which her reserve of power is not sufficient to enable her while submerged to cross, you have in fact made a wall behind which a convoy is safe. Apart from the advantage of an impervious barrier of this kind, the unnerving effect of the fear of the seaplane has to be remembered. The diary of a submarine commander which was published during the War contained many references to his constant terror lest when his craft came to the surface it should be spotted. When the sky is scanned at one moment the seaplane may be

invisible and yet two minutes later may be attacking. Such is the advantage of its 90 knots over the 18 of the submarine cruising on the surface.

Yet despite this danger it is necessary for the submarine to come up not only to save her under-water cruising energy but to use her guns for attack. Torpedoes are very big and a few at most can be carried. Shells are smaller and equally effective against lightly armed or unarmed merchant vessels. Many attacks of this kind occurred during the War. In 1915, as I mention elsewhere, there was the *Mercian* severely battered by a submarine not far from Malta. In March, 1917, the Belfast four-masted bark *Galgorn Castle* was assailed on her homeward journey. Shelling started at a quarter to five in the afternoon and continued until darkness fell. Now a submarine on the surface is unequally matched against a seaplane, and it was doubtless this growing practice of shelling which directed attention to the idea of a seaplane patrol.

The quantity of material available, however, never permitted, certainly not in the Mediterranean, of really effective organisation of anti-submarine work by air. The Adriatic Barrage was in reality a small part only of a big scheme of Mediterranean flying patrols we had dreamed of—more, worked out—at Port Said. If the machines had been in existence there is no doubt perfect safety could have been assured to transports bound Eastward, but then the machines were not in existence.

Our scheme was to direct all ships along one broad belt so patrolled that no spot was out of sight of an observer for more than half-an-hour at a time. This appears not so formidable a proposition when it



COMMANDER SAMSON AND CAPTAIN BENN

[Page 170.]

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is recollected that from 1,500 feet in height the ultimate—I do not say effective—range of sight is nearly fifty miles. It was proposed to leave the coast route via Sicily and Malta to the care of our Allies, the convoying of transports by the British from Malta on to Egypt being somewhat as follows. The bases were to be Malta and Crete. At the Malta base there were to be three trawlers, a fast seaplane carrier with a destroyer as escort, and motor launches for the service of the station. The Eastern Mediterranean would have been shut off by the patrol based on Malta and on the small convict island of Pantelaria between Malta and the African coast. The route to the East was to be covered by a seaplane carrier which would lie halfway between Malta and Crete, forming a mother ship for flying boats patrolling the route. At Crete there was to be the second base. A second seaplane carrier based on Suda Bay was to form a mother ship on the route between Crete and Port Said.

By such a watch, if well carried out, we might have created a belt impenetrable by submarines; in any case we would have narrowly restricted their energies by making surface attacks impossible. I have not the least doubt that this plan was perfectly feasible. Its expense compared with that of the ships necessary for doing the same work efficiently was low. Its efficiency, compared with that of the little armed trawlers which were supposed actually to do the work, was high. But the material was not there, and therefore only ancillary schemes were attempted, and of these the Adriatic Barrage was one.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE BOURBON KINGDOM

OUR work on the Adriatic Barrage gave us more than a nodding acquaintance with the Kingdom of the Bourbons. But the unparalleled richness of Italy in historical remains is only weakly shared in the south, where even the site of the cities whose names have become synonyms of luxury and ease is hardly known. George Gissing's book shows what a disappointment awaits the traveller. Names alone maintain the ancient tradition. Let me give a poignant example. At Sybaris you can hardly purchase a sandwich! However, it was not all disappointment. Calabria and Apulia may not be Tuscany and the Marches, but yet a Wing having bases at Taranto, Malta, Otranto and later at Vallona, provided tasks for a junior staff officer of a most pleasant kind, for a constant liaison was needed between our different ports. The halfway house between Taranto and Otranto is Lecce, a city of delightful shade with its white stone houses huddled together inside its high walls. Stone is so plentiful in this part that everything is made of it. It is cheaper and softer than wood to work, and as the Italians are congenital artists, decoration is profuse. The softness of the

material in the south substitutes carving for what, in the north, would be fresco. I am aware that Lecce is not a show-piece, but the town hall and church are, none the less, a marvellous example of how much the sculptor can crowd into a limited façade.

The highways in the south of Italy are just straight lines ruled across the landscape. It is common to see the white road, which usually has on it about four inches of dust, stretching straight before one for ten miles, sticking up like a stone obelisk in the distance.

From Lecce one reaches Otranto, which is a charming little fishing town. The cottages, the rocks in the blue water, the ancient church and the castle grouped round the bay make an ideal picture. Of course one's first thought is the castle. Did not Walpole give us its story in his "Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Novel," in which Providence executes its decrees by crushing its victim Conrad under a helmet of supernatural size—the helmet of the murdered Alfonso? And did not Alfonso's memorial in the neighbouring church of St. Nicholas recognise the judgment of Heaven by appearing bareheaded the while? So far the story. And does not history relate that this castle was built by an Alfonso? All true, but, alas! here to put two and two together—the origin of so much miscalculation—will lead us again astray. In 1480 the Turks wiped out the Otranto of Gothic times. No castle, if there was one, survived. The Alfonso who built this structure was of Aragon. Thus are the traveller's hopes denied! I never met anyone in the neighbourhood who had heard of Walpole or his novel.

Even Walpole, to do him justice, when a lady ad-



mirer wrote to him saying that she had made a pious pilgrimage to the Castle of Otranto, replied, "Dear Madam, I am extremely interested to hear that there is a castle at Otranto."

From Otranto Corfu can be reached in six hours in a motor-boat. Corfu is all and more than the fancy paints. The mountains of Albania are refreshing indeed after the sandy flatness of the east coast of Italy, and the island hills, crowned each with its own castle or fortress, form a picture of surpassing beauty. At this time Corfu was just seeing the last of the reconstituted Serbian Army. The French flag flew over one castle and there was the French fleet in the harbour. The Italian flag flew over another castle. British officers abounded in connection with a big convalescent camp which was projected. Serbian bases, more like sundowners' encampments, were scattered here and there and out-at-heel Serbian patrols marched the streets. The only people who were not in evidence were the Greeks and Corfiots. But the Corfiots differ from the merry Italians. Their houses are hovels, not miniature stone palaces. And the children frown, which seems strange after Apulia, where they always give you a smile.

New Taranto, which was our headquarters, is a fine modern city, but with little that is of surprising interest. Our offices, the centre of the Flying Service, were suitably situated in the Via Pitagora. "Suitably," I say, for did not Pythagoras foresee the wonders of aviation when he expressed, according to Malvolio, the opinion "that the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird"? The Irish saint, Cataldo, and the composer Paisiello are Taranto's most famous

men. There are seven music-halls, whose performances it is impossible to distinguish one from another. There is a pervasive, unquenchable love of melody in the town. Everybody sings. The children sing. The costermongers sing. The sailors sing. The peasants sing. The Neapolitan Canzonetti enjoy a real vogue, and the one which is the favourite you hear daily from the moment when its strains awake you till the moment when they lull you to sleep.

The love of opera is, of course, universal in Italy. I once saw what I thought a remarkable incident in a cheap music-hall. Following a number of serio-comic turns there was a diva who was to give a selection from "Rigoletto." A middle-aged bathykolpic lady gyrated on from the wings and started quite seriously with "Il Caro Nome." There were some young men in the front talking, perhaps tittering, about a tenth as loudly as is commonplace during the overture at Covent Garden. The lady was roused, but she never interrupted for one instant her hold on the rest of the audience. Taking advantage of a piece of recitative she interpolated, with a rapid upward gesture of her pendulous forearm, that she would not stand it and the young men ought to be ashamed of themselves and more to the same effect, whereupon two attendants approached on tip-toe, no one turning a hair, and in the twinkling of an eye the interrupters were gone. Never for a moment had the enthusiasm or the attention of the audience been checked or diverted and at the conclusion of the song there was a burst of uncontrollable applause. This, in a low-class dockyard music-hall where the best seat cost a lira-and-a-half!

At Taranto I acquired a mild form of malaria which fortunately necessitated a holiday in Rome, and as there I grew worse I was placed under the kindly care of the Blue Nuns at the Calvary Hospital at Monte Celio. Their hospital is stationed by the ancient church of S. Stefano Rotondo—it is, of course, the church and not S. Stefano which is Rotondo—an immense brick building dating from the time of Nero and probably a market in the early days. As travellers will remember, its chief interest to-day is in its series of pictures giving a Zolaesque representation of the sufferings of the Martyrs, every known form of martyrdom being represented. At the foot of our hospital garden was a spring where old Numa Pompilius, the third king of Rome, used to walk in the evening. Here he bargained for the Sibylline Books. Tradition pictures him giving for one book the price of three, a touch which will be recognised as convincing by the tourist bargain-hunter of to-day. In a cottage near by and seen from the window of the hospital lived for many years Palestrina, and there he composed some of his sweetest music.

From Rome I was passed by my kind hostesses to the Monastery of San Girolamo at Fiesole, where, not being good enough, as the Sister said with a twinkle in her eye, to occupy one of the cells of the Beati, I was lodged in the bed-sitting room of a Jesuit father. As a help to an orderly life my door had on it a little wooden tablet with a choice of six occupations, and by means of a plug and small holes I was invited like one of the old fathers to indicate in which of the six licit ways I was spending my time—"church," "cloister," "garden," "about the house," "busy,"

or "out." There was nothing more modern in this charming retreat than a well which had been recently added by Cosimo il Vecchio in 1452. I shall always cherish a feeling of the warmest gratitude to the kindly Mothers Superior and Nuns who tended me. In this incredibly lovely pleasaunce I soon recovered and it was with great regret I left to rejoin my Wing.

However, my association with the Adriatic Barrage and Commodore Sueter, to whom I now returned, was to come to an end. In October I was home on leave in connection with the redistribution of seats, which subsequently deprived me of a lifelong association with St. George's-in-the-East, when a change in the fortunes of war sent me back, not to the South but to the North of Italy. The Barrage, in fact, was my last work with the old Royal Naval Air Service. The country owes very much to Mr. Winston Churchill, Commodore Sueter, Commander Samson and the many young officers who staked their career, years before the outbreak of war, on the success of flying. Whatever criticisms may be made of the early days of the R.N.A.S., it was the service of ideas *par excellence*, and no one can say how much sooner we should not have secured the mastery of the air if Mr. Churchill had remained at the Admiralty. His departure was not a good thing for those who, as many of their comrades thought, had sacrificed a useful naval career for visionary adventures with toys. Theirs was indeed a rough road, but cheerfully they trod it. Their symbol was the beautiful golden eagle copied from a French Imperial design. There is a poem which I will reproduce, not for its skill nor because adaptations of Kipling's verses are unknown, but because

these lines do express truly the inward thoughts of pioneers to whom the nation is a debtor. A copy was handed to me inscribed "From the Originator of the Bird."

### THE BIRD.

*(With apologies to Rudyard Kipling.)*

If you maintained your faith when all around you  
Condemned the Air and labelled you a fool ;  
And persevered until the application  
Of hard, cold facts bore fruit with those who rule ;

If you have learned to hear the Truth you've spoken  
"Noted," "Referred" and passed on to the files,  
And known sound words of those who saw the future  
Derided with polite official smiles ;

If you have learned the strawless brick to fashion  
In spite of those who did withhold the straw,  
And waited till the blast of silent envy  
Did fan the flame of ridicule the more ;

If you have seen the thing that you've created  
(Your recompense of weary months of toil)  
Given to those who wait till odds are even,  
Then cluster round to gather up the spoil ;

If you have watched from at the central Zero  
The mounting list of those who now believe,  
I'll bet the world and all that there is in it  
You wear a golden bird upon your sleeve

## CHAPTER XXXII

### OUR ITALIAN AIR ALLIANCE

As I have already explained, while I was at home in October, 1917, trying to adjust affairs in connection with my constituency came the news of the Italian retreat at Caporetto. It was clear that work in the South at Taranto would shrink into insignificance compared with the assistance we were about to give the Italians in the North, and accordingly, with the leave of Commodore Sueter, I relinquished my connection with the Adriatic Barrage and was appointed as an observer to the 51st Wing, which was then forming, to work with General Plumer's forces. November in the north of Italy is a delightful month, so that I thoroughly enjoyed my long hunt for the new Headquarters, which I tracked down to a villa in a small village near Brescia. The move forward of our great convoy, motor lorries, tenders and cars, was for the first few days a very pleasant affair. The Italians had shown great relief and joy to see our forces appear, indeed the entry of our men by the Riviera—for they came by that route—was by a real path of flowers. Even at the time of my arrival, though the sight of British troops was no longer a novelty, the enthusiasm had not entirely

evaporated; everywhere smiles of welcome, and kindness and helpfulness warmer and readier even than the hospitable Italians are wont to show.

Before November, 1917, British air co-operation had been mainly confined to the work of the Adriatic Barrage in the South, and the loan of Bombing Flights kept at Taranto and elsewhere for flying across the Adriatic and attacking Cattaro. With the arrival of our Army in the North, two Wings, Nos. 14 and 51, and a Balloon Company were sent to assist, the whole forming a brigade. The work was self-dependent and was confined in theory to the sector of the Front on which the British troops were operating.

In point of fact this restriction was nugatory. There were three redoubtable Scout Squadrons, Nos. 45, 28 and 66, and it was impossible to prevent these mighty hunters from roaming over the whole of the Allied Front from Venice to Lake Garda. At first the enemy scored some successes, or perhaps I should say exhibited a certain amount of self-sacrifice, but after the aerial battle of Treviso at Christmas, 1917, his losses there and elsewhere began to be so heavy that he showed little fight, and the British Squadrons really had to scour the whole of the plains to find their quarry. The appearances of enemy machines were very carefully recorded and a map was published every week which might be called "The Hun Hunters' Guide," showing eager pilots when and where they might most readily hope to secure victims. I can remember squadrons ringing up (this was a breach of all discipline) complaining that they had been given the morning patrol instead of the work at dawn. This complaint was strange,

for the morning patrol gave the pilots a reasonable night's rest, while the dawn work meant very early rising. The explanation was that the morning promised no "bag," whereas at dawn there was always something to be picked up. Hence the bitterness.

During part of our time, owing to a failure of one class of Italian machines, we were requested to do artillery observation for at least two of the Italian Armies, and R.E. 8's with small escorts of our own Camels were sent to the aerodromes on the Grappa section. They were also protected by the Italian Hanriot scouts. In this matter of escort there was a wide difference of practice between ourselves and our Allies. The British theory is that the scout's work is to keep the whole sky clear of hostile aircraft so that it is unnecessary to give escorts, which are regarded as being destructive of the offensive spirit.

Considerable day bombing operations were undertaken by the Italians against enemy aerodromes and dumps. Prior to the summer of 1918 bombing by Capronis had been supposed to be a night job only. It had been carried out largely by triplanes, those gigantic craft known on account of their unwieldy dimensions as "model dwellings." These machines approach most nearly to the idea of a flying ship, their navigation and "coming to anchor" being more like big sea work. In a scout, the moment of actual landing is the one time when the pilot himself shows his sleight of hand; the clever side-slip, the light touch, both wheels down at once, all these are things which display the power of the master. In these triplanes (and I suppose it is the same with other big machines) the pilot did not do the landing himself.



He stood up shouting instructions to the N.C.O. at the wheel, thus foreshadowing the day when from the bridge of the flying liner the captain will send down his orders by electric telegraph to the engine-room.

The triplanes were never used except at night, and after a time not even then, on account of the difficulty of landing them in the dark. The biplanes, however, it was determined to use by day. The general plan of bombing operations was somewhat as follows. The objective would be approached by relays of biplanes each having a suitable escort of scouts, the strictest formation flying being enjoined. The British machines did not do escort duty, but their special task was to pick out a neighbouring aerodrome and hide in the clouds or sit in the sun somewhere near it. When the Capronis were seen approaching the objective, the first thing the enemy guard did was to telephone to the nearest scout squadron. Seeing an easy prey in the huge bombers, up came the opposing chasers, only to fall into the hands of the British hovering above. This manoeuvre was successful on more than one occasion.

In passing, I must mention a pleasing international occurrence. At our aerodrome about this time the ceremony took place of handing the Military Cross to Gabriele d'Annunzio, the very gallant poet-flyer, who was in command of the Squadron on the Lido alluringly named "la Serenissima." We were formed up in a square, suitable remarks were made by the General, the medal was conferred, and d'Annunzio delighted us with a short speech touching on the friendship between England and Italy and not forgetting the parallel between the ancient sea-power of

Venice and the British Navy. As he moved away, the Italians, who ever have an eye for the dramatic, put up machines dropping leaflets expressing best wishes for the success of our joint aerial efforts.

The beginning of the great Austrian offensive between June 15th and 30th, 1918, gave no special employment to the British machines, who on the first morning carried on as usual, destroying eight enemy aircraft and two balloons, which was about the daily toll. Towards midday, however, a report came that the Austrians were crossing the Piave opposite the Montello. Patrols of all available machines were immediately organised and spent the afternoon going and coming. Boats filled with men were sunk, pontoon bridges packed with troops were raked with machine-gun fire and bombed from a low altitude. In twenty-four hours 31,000 rounds were fired and five tons of bombs dropped, this by a force very inconsiderable in numbers. At the same time, our Italian friends were hard at work. Their Capronis were bombarding and their Nieuports attacking in the same way as our Camels. The Austrians were not idle, in fact they put the whole of their available air force into this offensive. Some people think that these attacks are negligible and that even their moral effect is not to be considered, but an extract from the *Neue Freie Presse* which came into our hands amply supported our view of the effectiveness of the work done.

EXTRACT FROM THE *Neue Freie Presse*.

Suddenly airmen also appear. They come silently down from a great height in far-reaching volplanes. Now their motors hum and their machine-guns rattle. A hail of steel

pelts down on the pontoons, which sink riddled. The guns of the defence bark from the bank and fragments of their shrapnel endanger the lives of their own men, men whom they wish to protect. One, two, three of the great Caproni bombarding planes descend, shot down on the mud of Montello. A Nieuport comes down like a torch hurled from Heaven—the famous airman, Major Barracca, is a heap of ashes. His list of victories is the same as that of his most victorious Austrian adversary, Captain Brumowsky, who conquered thirty-four opponents. Lieutenant von Hoffman, in peace time a Ministerial official in Vienna, and his band dash against the biplanes. Like raging bulldogs the English now advance on their furiously swift Sopwiths against our airmen, engineers, artillery and infantry. Nothing, absolutely nothing, avails. The enemy airmen are too numerous, the enemy's shells too many. Like Sisyphus multiplied a hundred-fold the bridge-builders work incessantly; they fall and disappear in the flood without a cry; they launch new pontoons; they think out new methods of transport from bank to bank—nothing helps; absolutely nothing avails. Six times are the bridges and footways completed, six times are they destroyed.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### TWO WINGS AT WORK

Now for some account of the doings of our own Wings. On our way to the Piave Front we stayed for some days in Verona, for it was still doubtful whether the Austrians would not break through the Trentino and cut off the forces on the Venetian plain from the rest of the Italian Army. From Verona we went forward again to Padua, between which city and the Montello the British Air Force was now to be disposed. This was the first time I had seen troops marching through a European country and very impressive I found it. The roads were torn to ribbons by ceaseless columns of batteries, and unending ant-like processions of lorries. At first the weather was cold and dry, and journeying was pleasant enough, but when the rain came later the squalor of the highway was unspeakable and formed a fitting framework for the picture of the retiring Italian armies reduced in appearance and condition to the level of gipsy caravans. The ever present background to this welter of mud and filth was the shining white wall of the Alps.

When we were settled down, my duty included a good many visits to the batteries in the line, in

connection with our artillery observation, and took me frequently through the mediæval cities of Castelfranco and Cittadella. Castelfranco, with its gates and towers and walls and moat all apparently unchanged since the Dark Ages, has a charm of its own apart from the distinction of being the birthplace of Giorgione and the home of one of his masterpieces. On the ramparts sentries were mounted once again, after the lapse of perhaps five hundred years, and were manning, not slings nor cauldrons of boiling lead, but the latest type of machine-gun for defence against aircraft. Thus were the ages strangely spanned.

After a short time I was attached to a flight as an observer, and took up my billet with three young friends in the attic of a shoeing-smith's house. Some Italian officers were also quartered in the village. I set myself to fill up the great vacant spaces between the actual flying hours by renewing old studies of the Italian language. My friend in this matter and my great help was to be the village priest. He was a kindly old soul who had given up nearly the whole of his house to the use of English officers, compressing his simple *ménage* into an ever-narrowing compass for our benefit. His one grief was that the authorities had forbidden him to ring his bells. Now every village in the Veneto has its church, according to our reckonings hugely disproportionate to the population of the countryside, and each church has, like St. Mark's, a detached campanile and a fine peal of bells. Indeed, I have no doubt the ringing sets the time for the daily duties of the village households. We obtained from Headquarters permission for the

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BOMBS PHOTOGRAPHED AS THEY ARE LEAVING THE MACHINE. VIEW SHOWS HILLY GROUND  
[Page 220]  
BELOW WITH ROADS AND WOODS.

worthy old cleric to set his chimes to work again, and it was pleasant to see him happy. But we were not popular generally, for thereafter from early dawn to midnight the village bells were never for a moment dumb.

My work here as an observer was my first experience of counter-battery, and was of a far safer kind, need I say, than similar duty on the French Front. At the same time, especially in the first few months, when the Germans were still keeping considerable reinforcements on the line, it was by no means without minor excitements. I well remember the first shoot we did. The pilot was attending to the regulation of our fire, my job being to watch for the Huns. As there were for the first hour or so ten or fifteen aeroplanes always in sight, I found my task an anxious one, because, not being very familiar with the Austrian types, I had to risk letting machines get fairly near in order to identify them. As a matter of fact they were nearly all Allies, but not all. I was watching a small Italian patrol of three or four aircraft on the other side of the line considerably higher than we were, and only just visible. Above them were a few Huns. The Italians were flying quite straight and being steadily pursued by Archie, in fact they appeared to be flying through a double hedge of Archie puffs. It reminded me of the penny gaff where the conjurer throws knives outlining the form of some daring *confrère*. Here the invisible hand was planning perfect lines of smoke bursts on each side of the tiny patrol. Suddenly something happened. One Italian dropped out of the flight and started to twiddle to earth in a sickening spin resembling the fall of a

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helpless leaf. In a few moments he disappeared against the dark background of the fields and in another second there was a high black column of smoke supported on a flaming crimson base ; exactly as if the invisible conjurer, changing his trick, had snatched a huge black handkerchief off a red billiard ball.

I think in the early part of the year the Piave was only very lightly held. Certainly the job which was allotted to us one day, of taking low oblique photographs of the Austrian positions, was carried through without any objection on their part. We flew three times along the bed of the river from Nervesa to Ciano and had a perfect opportunity of inspecting the villages on the other side, but no attempt was made to drive us away except for one very wide shot apparently fired by a field gun.

On another occasion we were ordered to photograph some of the ex-Italian aerodromes fifteen or twenty miles over the lines. We were to start at 10.30 in the morning, climbing for an hour, which was about the time required by a R.E. 8 to reach 10,000 feet. At that height we were to meet our escort of six Camels, I was to give the signal with a light, and the cavalcade was to start off for the lines. The view of the plain from 10,000 feet was wonderful. Venice appeared to be right underneath us and the Alps dangerously near. The height was just sufficient to enable us to see over the first row of mountains on to the plateau. The range, which from the ground resembled a wall, from the air seemed to be an ocean.

Punctually at the agreed time our procession starts. Archie is active, you can hear him, you feel sharp

bumps as if someone had taken the tail of the machine and was shaking it, and then, as you cross the line, you see puffs of black, which is Hun, and red, which is Italian captured ammunition. It is very difficult to spot the guns that are firing. If they could be seen easily it would not be hard to get our counter-batteries to work on them. The pilot deals with Archie by sharp turns to the right or left; or just as the hostile gunner is getting his calculations right the pilot will stall, so that, flying speed being lost, our machine drops a hundred feet or so and completely fools the carefully timed shells. After about a quarter of an hour's flying over the line we come up to the first town. I am hard at it counting railway trucks, noting dumps of stores, looking for trains in motion, enumerating tents and trying to spot movement on the roads, all the time with one eye on the escort, because if the escort goes it is a bad look-out for a single R.E. 8 so far over the enemy line. Between my note-book and glances at the camera to see that the automatic mechanism is working well—for if the photographs are not made our efforts are in vain—I am kept busy. Just as I am deeply interested in the number of tents in a small camp and feeling agreeably rested because Archie has stopped, I hear the pilot turn and shout "Hun," and immediately the presence of the said Hun becomes apparent by the "Ka-Ka-Ka-Ka" of his machine-gun. I jump up and swing our gun round just as a big yellow single-seater with an Iron Cross painted boldly on the fabric flies by our wing surely not more than twenty-five yards away. Of course a single-seater can only fire ahead, so I am able to pour a little burst into him as he passes

without any possibility of a reply. He dives and attempts to disappear, but one of the scouts is on him like a stone. In the meantime my attention is turned to three other Huns, but perceiving our escort, which is above us, they turn off also. After a few more photographs we are tearing along for home, stalling, diving, climbing, to dodge the barrage which, of course, is hottest in the front line. Another quarter-of-an-hour and the Piave is under us, a Verey cartridge is fired to liberate our escort, and we glide into our own aerodrome to examine what harm, if any, we have suffered. A bit of the cowling knocked off the engine and a hole in the plane is the extent of the injury. Then comes a voluminous report which must have gladdened the heart of the General Staff and furnished material for reams of operation orders and plans. The Camels, in the meantime, have returned to their aerodrome, treating themselves by way of a *bonne bouche* to the slaughtering of an Austrian photographic machine which was returning at that moment from carrying out over our lines work exactly similar to that which we had been doing on the other side.

The main drawbacks of the aeroplane are the noise and rush of wind, which make comfortable communication with the pilot a matter of impossibility. How different is the calm of the balloon, as I found when I acted as observer in one of our K.B.'s in the neighbourhood of Montebelluna. The day was of intense interest to me, for all the details were quite new; to see the balloon hauled down; to observe its gigantic bulk on the ground; to inspect the rope parachute harness hung round the arms and legs of

the observer and the knife with which he is provided in order, after a jump, to cut free the parachute should it try tricks with him on the ground ; all these were minor excitements, very pleasing to a novice. I remember stepping into the basket and looking round at the few Italian farm-women who had come from a neighbouring house to see us go up. From them I turned for a moment to examine the maps and instruments. I heard an order given and then turned again thinking to have another look at the interesting Venetian rustics. To my amazement they were not there, and when I peeped over the basket I became aware that we were already hundreds of feet up. This was the great surprise to me. *Silence* instead of deafening noise and rushing air ; all still. This impression was much deepened by the four hours we spent on watch and is a very pleasant one. There is no feeling of seclusion in the aeroplane, the bang and rattle are too great, but in the balloon basket the sense of retreat is complete. The view was, of course, superb and seen to much greater advantage than from a machine. All the earth sounds were clearly audible, a cycle horn, the bark of a dog, the whir of aircraft approaching us. There was a delightful calm about it all. I yearned for a hammock chair, and am afraid did actually fall asleep in the canvas sling provided. My companion and I were, however, preparing to control a shoot, and here what struck me as strange was that the gun burst could be clearly heard. In an aeroplane, of course, unless an eagle eye sees the flash, it is hard to know that the gun has been fired, for the ear tells nothing. We listened to the ringing of church bells, the sound of a bugle and

a military band marching some men to the line. Communication between our two selves was simple. We were, moreover, on a direct wire with the battery we were controlling and we could talk to our near neighbours, who were in the next balloon tethered at 3,000 feet about three miles down the line. After four hours, visibility became bad and we were hauled down to 100 feet, when the lorry started to tow us off to the balloon-shed some few miles away; and so we passed like a giant in seven-leagued boots striding along lanes, over fields, farmhouses, and churches, until we reached the dry tarpaulins which make a clean lying for the balloon. The cable was detached, the crew held us, we jumped out, the basket was carried away, the telephone removed, and in three minutes the balloon was being walked to bed, in a manner so quaint as to round off suitably a real nursery fairy story.

Life was by no means restricted to patrols and billets. Our transport was plentiful, and journeys on business were frequent and eagerly enjoyed. Imagine the delight of a motor trip on an April morning in the bright sunshine from Padua to Ferrara, through mediæval towns as unspoilt as any in the world. We pass through Padua at half-past six. The city is seen at its best in the morning, when the low, slanting rays of the sun set off in brilliant light and shade the streets with their inimitable wall paintings and carvings. The market hall, the great blue clock, the river gilded with heavenly alchemy, the moat, the walls—there is not an aspect of this priceless city which does not clutch the heart and leave for ever memories. Skirting the moat, we make south on the straight road

alongside the canalised river, passing the château of Cattajo, erected by the Venetian family of the Obizzi and now the property of an enemy alien, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Este, to Battaglia, with its little bridge recalling the Rialto at Venice. Leaving on our right the Euganean Hills beloved of Shelley, we reach Monselice. This conical hill seems to have been specially designed by Providence for the robber chiefs of the dark ages, for it is inaccessible, easily defended by reason of its smallness, and set plumb, on a main road. Such is its natural strength that it hardly needs the protection of its walls, which resemble so closely those of its neighbours, Marostica, Este and Citadella. However, there they are and still largely intact, guarding the squalid little village at the foot of the hill. Since those lawless bygone days, a noble family has set a lovely country palace on the southern slope. True to inherited traditions the present Count is a fighter, in fact was an aviator with the Lido squadron. His forebears were famous in Venetian history, the first distinguished member of the family being an Admiral who played no mean part in the victory at Lepanto. Another of the ruling Counts became Venetian Ambassador at Rome. He was a godly man and stood high in favour with the Pope of his day, of whom he obtained permission to remove some of the holy relics from the catacombs. Accordingly, about a dozen saints were thus translated and the Count put them, dressed in rich silk and gold raiment and lace, in glass-fronted coffins. These he placed around the little oratory he was building for his castle, and they remain to this day a goal for many a pious traveller. But the Count did more.

He collected twelve bottles which contain each a relic of the Apostles, and a portion of St. Joseph's coat.

Standing here on the Terrace by the Via delle sette Chiese—built as a compliment to Rome's seven most famous churches—and looking right down the straight road which leads to Ferrara and then on to Bologna, over the fair sun-bathed landscape and viewing the fat richness of the fields, we hardly need the inspiration of the martial music of a passing regiment to make us understand the yearning in the bosom of Attila's shaggy warriors to leave their cold and hungry hills and possess themselves of this land.

Este, which is in the neighbourhood, is an interesting town off the beaten track, but except for the fine walls of the old Castle there seems little to remind us that it is the name city of one of the most powerful families in Europe. The churches hereabout suffered from the jealousy of Venice, if indeed the story be true that the Republic out of pride in St. Mark's would not permit their feudatory cities to adorn their churches with façades. Such is the explanation given of the unfinished state of San Giustina at Padua. After a pleasant lunch we hurry on through Rovigo to Ferrara. It would be impossible even to enumerate the alluring interests of Ferrara—the moated castle, the cathedral façade, the Diamond Palace, the Palazzo Schifanoia. Lucretia Borgia's husband belonged to the place and there is the column in the Piazza which has successively sustained the effigies and the glory of Hercules, Napoleon and Ariosto!

I cannot leave these notes of one of our little excursions amongst the beauties which lay at the very gates of the British Camp in Italy without expressing

the great disappointment I felt at the failure of the authorities to educate the officers, and men too, up to the enjoyment of these advantages, which would probably never come their way again. For no doubt excellent reasons, leave was restricted to a rest camp on Lake Garda, delightful in itself ; but whilst general educational classes were held in training areas, I never heard of any attempt to organise instructional parties of men and to show them something of the country in which they were living. Assistance from the civic authorities would certainly have been forthcoming for this purpose, but nothing of the kind was done.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### AIR RAIDS FROM BOTH POINTS OF VIEW

UNTIL the Germans withdrew their bombing squadron from the Austrian Front a pretty steady counter-offensive was kept up against us. Their first big effort appeared to be the direct result of the exuberance of spirits of Colonel, then Captain, Barker, V.C., and a young friend of his, known in the Wing as "Baby Hudson." As a preliminary to our Christmas feast, which kept the little village of Fossalunga pretty busy, Barker and Hudson went off in the morning for an expedition of their own, hedge-hopping on two Camels considerably to the rear of the Austrian lines. The first thing they did was to set fire to a hangar on one of the aerodromes, and then, as we learnt officially afterwards, they attacked a leave train, containing unfortunate officers and men going home for Yuletide celebrations. I believe eleven casualties were inflicted in the train; in any case the greatest annoyance was caused to the enemy, and it was to this enterprising adventure that we attributed what happened the next day. At this time we were occupying conjointly with two Italian squadrons the large aerodrome at Fossalunga on the old Via Postumia, where we had a number of hangars for R.E. 8's, and where the

## AIR RAIDS. TWO POINTS OF VIEW 235

Italians, according to their own practice, had built concrete sheds, each accommodating many scouts.

It was just after breakfast on Boxing Day that a big force of twenty-five of the enemy appeared over the aerodrome, favoured, as General Diaz's account said, by a mist. All who were present bear witness to the courage of the Italian mechanics, who stood their ground, starting up the scouts, although the enemy circled round the field, machine-gunning everything on it. Our two-seaters, of course, could do nothing, and so the brisk air battle was carried on by scouts and bombers, gradually moving farther and farther from the original scene of attack, towards the bombers' lines. The net result was that the Italian hangar was burned down, five Italians and one of our men were killed, and a dreary procession of light tenders set off for the village with the other casualties.

For some unknown reason the Austrians were not satisfied with this first battle, in which they by no means got the best of it, and at half-past twelve eight big machines returned to the attack. By this time our side was much more on the alert. The scouts instantly rose, both British Camels and Italian Hanriots; the air was singing with the wind in their wires. The enemy beat a hasty and disastrous retreat, their net loss for the day being eight machines down on our side and three on their own. I went to have a look at one of the big three-seaters which had fallen on the Montello. Though it was entirely made of metal, it was so distorted and charred that it was impossible to say from its appearance what had been its original structure or purpose.

That Boxing night the attack was renewed, another

of the Italian hangars being set on fire by the use of petrol bombs. The enemy were very subtle on this occasion, for after the hangar had been burning for an hour or two, sufficiently long as they calculated, and quite correctly, to collect the commanding officers and a large group of pilots and men, the attackers came over again and laid a long line of bombs across the aerodrome. Fortunately they had miscalculated the drift, so that all the bombs, which went off in a perfect series, fell fifty yards to the side of the assembled crowd.

This was the beginning of a regular series of raids. Every night for seven nights in succession came the machines, sometimes twice, sometimes three times. Some big bombs were exploded on the aerodrome. Of the 300-pounders, which were about four feet high, they detonated two; two others, unexploded, remained for many weeks embedded in the field and were marked with a white flag to warn careless pilots not to run them down.

I have merely spoken here of what came within my personal experience, but, of course, at this time, and during the whole of January as well, Padua, Treviso, Castelfranco and all the neighbouring towns suffered heavy bombardments, the worst damage being done at Padua and Treviso.

These events left no doubt in our mind of the power, as a weapon, of the night bomber. Only to keep us awake would have been worth while, for as we had our work to do every day, we absolutely needed good sleep. Nature found a partial anodyne in fatigue. After the first couple of nights few paid much attention to the raids, although the enemy tried to bomb us out

of our village. Later on we moved to wooden huts near the aerodrome, and I can remember a raider straddling our dwelling with two bombs, and sending mud falling on the roof, without getting a single person out of bed. But the strain told none the less, and no one to-day will deny the moral effects of aerial bombardment.

That is one side of the picture. Now let me describe an attack we ourselves made on Pordenone Aerodrome. General Bongiovanni, as I have already explained, had begun to employ the Caproni biplane, which had previously been mostly used for night work, in the light, and it was up to us, therefore, also to carry on day bombing so far as our material permitted. On this occasion I was to fly as observer in the leader of twelve bombers, and we were to have an escort of fifteen Camels, so that a formidable squadron, sufficient presumably to discourage any Austrian scouts who might wish to attack us, was to cross the lines. Pordenone, near the Tagliamento River, was a big aerodrome which had formerly been occupied by the Italians with airships, and since the retreat had become one of the chief centres of the Austrians. Our rendezvous was to be over Castelfranco at 10,000 feet; it must be remembered that aerial rendezvous are fixed not only in longitude and latitude, but also in altitude. We were on the spot, with eight of the bombing machines, well to time, and we circled over the wonderful fourteenth century walls to await our escort. The pilot had as much as he could manage to keep the machine in order, for at that height a cold wind and very nasty bumps were coming off the mountains. The Camels, of course, as they climbed

much faster than we, did not start until we had laboriously acquired the necessary height. At the appointed moment we looked round and I could see, not the fifteen, but only nine of the Camels. The pilot asked me what was to be done and I advised a short wait ; but petrol had to be considered, and after a few moments we were compelled to make a decision. I could only see at this time four scouts, but as I had counted nine, and as we were the leaders with whom alone rested the power to give the dismissal, I presumed that all the other scouts, at least to the number of nine, were in the vicinity. Accordingly I fired a red light and the diminished formation made a start. The first thing to do was to get through the barrage, which was kept going pretty vigorously from the Austrian front line. When we were through it, I was disquieted to observe that there were only six of us two-seaters, and that the other two-seaters had turned, taking with them the few Camels which had started, so that instead of a large force of twenty-seven machines, only six helpless non-fighting R.E. 8's were left. My pilot, of course, was blissfully ignorant, as, looking ahead from the first machine, he could not expect to see the formation. It was very hard to decide whether or not to fire the pre-arranged signal and disperse the whole six to get home as safely as they could. But it seemed to me no moment for irresolution. Being through Archie, it was much better to try to carry out the original plan. If we had to make the dash back we might just as well make it after we had attempted what had been ordered as turn with nothing accomplished. Accordingly, we kept on our course, and in very good formation too.

As we passed in the neighbourhood of the towns we came under fire, but that was not half so unnerving as the knowledge that each battery firing was telephoning all particulars about us and news of the direction in which we were obviously going, so that the farther we penetrated the more certain we were of encountering the enemy, not only Archie, which was a minor consideration, but scouts. Of course, against proper scout work we were absolutely helpless.

I had little time to take the photographs and make the reconnaissance report which I had hoped to bring back as a priceless gem for the Intelligence Officer. My whole task latterly was confined to watching the sky and our own five friends. The worst of it was that we had to pass over five or six of the most active aerodromes, and we were perfectly conspicuous to the people on the ground.

Finally we reached Pordenone, keeping along the main railway line to guide us. We had dropped our bombs and were marking time waiting for the formation to close up, when two enemy scouts got off the ground, but evidently thought better of their intention and left us alone. We ran into some more opposition, however, on our way back to the Piave. We prepared to repel one fellow who came for us, but he dodged and passed on to the tail of our formation, where he was very gallantly assailed by the observer, whose bitter grievance subsequently was that we made him come straight home instead of letting him pursue. After anxious moments we recrossed the river, heading for Treviso, having accomplished a trip of about fifty miles over the enemy lines with no damage but

scratches from spent Archies which had fallen into the fuselage, and a severed elevator wire in the rear-most machine. That the whole six of us got safely back to Fossalunga was no great tribute to the Hun's watchfulness or courage, for it is true to say that had six of their reconnaissance machines without escort so much as peeped over on our side not one would have returned to tell the tale.

Dem englischen Fliegerkorps.

*Mitteilungen über das Schicksal der auf unserer Seite abgestürzten, bzw. abgeschossenen englischen Fliegeroffiziere:*

Lt. R. ERSKINE } 2.1.1918.  
2/Lt. D. W. ROSS } 11.1.1918.

*tot. Mit militärischen  
Ehren in S. Fior begraben.*

Lt. R. S. GAISFORD }  
Lt. L. W. M. MOORE }

*Brennend abgestürzt. Von  
der Infanterie mit militä-  
rischen Ehren begraben.*

2/Lt. F. D. C. GOORE 2.2.1918.

*Schwere Kopfverletzung.  
Nach 20 Stunden im Spital  
in Pasiato (ca. 15 km süd-  
Pordenone) gestorben.*

*Über das Schicksal des seit 19.12.1917 vermissten Lt. L. B. MAY ist noch immer  
nichts bekannt. Weitere Erhebungen sind im Gange.*

*Die österreichisch-ungarischen Flieger.*

FACSIMILE OF ONE OF THE MESSAGES DROPPED BY THE AUSTRIANS GIVING DETAILS OF THE FATE  
OF BRITISH AVIATORS. [Page 246.]



To you  
dedicated

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE HOME OF PETRARCH AND VIRGIL

THE winter was very cold on the Piave front, and fuel was not plentiful in our billets. Some of us, therefore, eagerly seized the opportunity which presented itself of running a lorry by night into the front line and bringing back firewood from the shell-shattered town of Nervesa. Travellers will remember that this is the town where the railway from the south crosses the Piave *en route* for Conegliano and Udine. The Piave is narrowest at Nervesa, and in consequence there was here more definition of the battle-line; in fact, one could almost hear the voices of the Austrian sentries on the other side. Higher up, where the bed of the river becomes wide, there was always some doubt as to which of the gravelly islands were held by each side.

We had to wait till after dark before the lorry was allowed to go on any road visible to the enemy. There had been a storm that day, and there were two feet of snow on the ground, which made the roads very silent; no traffic, no people, no sound of life, no lights, no moon, only starlight. As we approached the town we were more than once stopped by sentries, who,

however, after explanations, accorded us the freedom seldom denied to the Flying Corps. Once we were pulled up by a real obstacle in the form of a motor wagon, which had been caught in a shell-hole hidden by the snow, from which it was unable to extricate itself; thus warned, some of us for the rest of the journey marched in front of our lorry as skirmishers, testing the road and informing the driver when the surface was broken.

A little later we entered the deserted town. The main building, almost facing the river and set in a public garden, was the Nervesa Municipio, a fine structure with Grand Hall, Staircase, Libraries and Assembly Room, but all battered to pieces by the Austrian guns. Many houses around had shared the same fate, and from these we quickly accumulated a full load of firewood consisting of window frames, doors, smashed furniture, and the like. All the work was done in the dark, as any sort of light would have drawn the fire of the watchful enemy. As we were clambering through the ruined Town Hall a curious thing happened; daylight appeared, as if by surprise, where everything had previously been night; the street became very bright, set off by deep shadows. The impression was but momentary, for the Austrian searchlight soon swung slowly round to scan other sectors of our front.

A fortunate occasion for another business jaunt was provided by the establishment of hutments on our various aerodromes. We had to go in search of reeds, matting made from which was one of our minor building materials. We desired to find, for reasons of economy, the real market, and so were led in this

quest, step by step, from the outskirts of Verona to the city itself; from there on to Mantua in the hope of still better prices; and finally to the purely industrial village of Ostiglia, which lies on the banks of the Po and draws the raw material of a big manufacture from the large and fertile marshes bordering Italy's only navigable river. Mantua is a gem; the quaint square, the wonderful jumble of palace, prison, church, towers, walls, drawbridges and moats, are all thrown, in proper perspective, into the Middle Ages, by the inevitable statue of Garibaldi, and the Middle Ages themselves have as a background the memories of Virgil. It is understood that after the Union of Italy every municipality was enjoined to erect a Cavour, a Victor Emmanuel or a Garibaldi to adorn its public square. Most chose Garibaldi, and from the decorative point of view no doubt they were right. Padua selected Cavour, whose squat and unimpressive lines almost persuade the Londoner that he is once again at home, gazing at some familiar statue in our metropolis. Fiesole did best, showing both Victor and Giuseppe riding to meet in the market place.

The cathedral of St. Andrew at Mantua is the most perfect example of a purely decorative effect produced without any relief at all, the whole work being painted in sepia tint, a complete change from the familiar pictorial frescoes. The crypt has the priceless relic of our Lord set in a somewhat gaudy sanctuary. You enter Mantua by a bridge entirely built over with water mills, and you leave it by a drawbridge and causeway lying beyond a great square castle set forward to protect the town, in the broad waters which form the outward defence. In these remoter parts,

where British soldiers were not so commonly seen, we still heard echoes of the warm welcome, I might say the grateful welcome, which had greeted the first appearance of our troops in Italy.

Not far behind the British lines to the south of Padua lie the Euganean Hills, and a journey to our Park, which was in this direction, justified a *détour* to the centre of this sweet country to visit the house of the famous poet at the little village called, on his account, Arquà Petrarca. Petrarch lived and died here, and is buried in a simple tomb which stands on four stone feet in the public place outside the little church. It bears the following lines :

FRIGIDA FRANCISCI LAPIS HIC TEGIT OSSA PETRARCE  
SUSCIPE VIRGO PARENS ANIMAM ! SATE VIRGINE PARCE !  
FESSAQUE NAM TERRIS CÆLI REQUIESCAT IN ABCE.

MOOCLXXIII

XVIII JULII.

The village is a long way up the hill and is very quiet, and the arrival of Englishmen created some stir. On each side of the church are wonderful fourteenth century houses quite unspoiled ; the one a peasant's cottage, the other with Venetian Gothic archways reminiscent of the richness of the East. Petrarch's house stands back from the village on the side of the hill. It is shut in a little garden surrounded by a high wall and well shaded with cypresses and firs. The usual outside stair leads into a loggia and thence into the dwelling. The Dining Room with its balcony has views over a countryside whose natural features are of the *petite* kind. The furniture is old, but not of Petrarch's period. The ceilings of panelled wood, brightly painted and producing the richest effect,

## HOME OF PETRARCH AND VIRGIL 245

date from the poet's time. The walls of the house are of stone and it is a pity that someone has been allowed to paint on them bad friezes representing the subjects of Petrarch's poems. But this passion for fresco is in the Italian blood. It cannot be repressed. No farmhouse or barn but has a saint or virgin painted on its walls.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### CHIVALRY AND BATTLE

DURING the summer of 1918 we were quite pleased with ourselves, as indeed we had cause to be, for in six months three squadrons with an establishment of fifty-four scouts brought down close upon 300 of the enemy. But we were also on the best of terms with the Austrian Flying Corps. With proper consideration we took the greatest trouble to inform the enemy of the fate of the numerous pilots and observers who were brought down on our side of the line. This correspondence was carried on by means of letters dropped by our scouts on the enemy aerodromes. The Austrians reciprocated most generously, and no request which we made concerning our men ever waited long for a reply. The information was typewritten in German, addressed to the "English Flying Corps" and usually signed "Austro-Hungarian Flyers."

I remember one instance of special kindness on the part of the enemy which had a curious result. We had lost a two-seater in the valley near Levico. None of its companions could say what had happened except that it had appeared to get into combat with some

enemy scouts. Inquiries which were made produced a charming letter from the Austrians in which they said: "These two officers met their death in aerial combat and are buried in our cemetery of heroes at Levico." The message was enclosed in a tube and was accompanied by two beautiful half-plate photographs, the one showing the funeral procession leaving the mortuary headed by a priest in robes carrying a crucifix, and the other showing the coffin being lowered into the grave with some of the leading Austrian flying men paraded to do it honour. We were greatly touched by this instance of good feeling on the part of our enemies, and redoubled our efforts to keep them informed as to the fate of their own companions.

The following pathetic little story I can vouch for. An unmistakable enemy machine appeared over one of our aerodromes, apparently photographing. It made no attack on anyone. But it was an enemy, and up went the scouts to hunt it down. They were successful. The pilot was shot dead and the machine fell, out of control, in a field. When they went to it to pick out the man, they learned his mission. He was merely the bearer of a packet of letters from our own captured friends beyond the lines.

Sometimes we came face to face with our foes. Once, when the bombing campaign was proceeding in great earnest, two of the prisoners taken in one machine, which was brought down outside Treviso were lodged with us. The purpose, I am afraid I must admit, was to extract from them what information they would give. One was a forbidding-looking man who simply frowned and from whom nothing whatever



could be learned. He was remitted accordingly, but the companion, a stoutish, middle-aged, good-natured fellow, stayed for several days. He turned out to be a solicitor who had been very successful as an infantry officer, and had been repeatedly decorated, though, like all enemy officers, he wore no ribbons when engaged in active operations. He had only lately joined the Flying Service; in fact, this was his first trip over the lines. Both of these officers wrote letters to their families, letters which were duly delivered by our pilots. Our solicitor became quite a favourite. He helped willingly in the office, but although bombarded from all sides with inquiries in French, Italian and German, he always replied with smiling, courteous firmness to what he considered military questions, "Das kann ich nicht sagen."

May I point out to super-patriots who had no time to go to the War, being busy nosing out traitors at home, or Titus Oatesing helpless aliens into the police courts, that the modest survival we fostered of the ancient ways of chivalry did nothing whatever to diminish the ardour of our men. On the contrary, they were keener than ever, and to entertain an Austrian prisoner in the mess one night only appeared to add to the zest with which the hunters would start at dawn and scour the skies for miles beyond the lines. There was no small competition between the squadrons for the best total "bags." Each combat was reported instantly to Wing Headquarters by telephone and at the end of the day the sums were compared. On one occasion, No. 66 Squadron, one of the most brilliant, was down on its luck. It was after seven o'clock and we telephoned through to ask whether they had

anything to record, maliciously adding the information that the other squadrons had had a successful day. This was too much for some of the ardent spirits in No. 66, who thereupon set out on what they were pleased to call a "special mission." Miles behind the enemy lines they went, in the growing dusk, and on the far side of the Tagliamento discovered some wretched beginner flying round an aerodrome on a two-seater school machine. He was sent in bits to the ground, having served the useful purpose of saving No. 66 from the shame of recording a blank.

In our Wing Intelligence Office we took a special pleasure in identifying the enemy units which were engaged against us, and a very elaborate card index, made up from information supplied from all the Fronts, followed with some care the disposition of the small aerial force in the service of the Dual Empire. We would hear that such a company was on the Roumanian Front; that such a flight had appeared in France; or again that it was reported in Albania; and the news could be checked and verified. This was not all. The names of the commanding officers were known and tit-bits of news gathered from German papers or from the cross-examination of prisoners often confirmed, in an amusing way, information which we had collected. For example, I remember that our records showed an officer from a "crack cavalry regiment" as having been put in command of a squadron. Later a "scandal" of the usual type, of which we heard, in that squadron was claimed as confirming our previous information.

On one occasion we had a curious example of the value of circumstantial evidence. I mentioned that

the Austrians had supplied us with an excellent photograph of the funeral of two of our men who were buried at Levico. We had also heard, with some interest, a rumour that the XXIIInd Squadron had moved from the Roumanian Front and was due on the Asiago. From other sources, by means of our undefeated card index, we had learned the name of the commanding officer of the XXIIInd. We will call it Captain Braunschweig. So far, that was all the information we had. Some months after the receipt of the photograph a pilot-sergeant was taken prisoner and we were conducting him round the office and talking to him for the general purpose of finding out what we could. Presently he was shown this photograph. "Ah!" he said, pointing to one of the figures standing by the graveside, "I know that officer. I served under him. He is called Captain Braunschweig." And so the missing link in the chain of evidence was provided and we knew that Captain Braunschweig, and therefore the XXIIInd Squadron, were now at Levico opposing us.

The Italian Flying Corps, although it suffered, as did every other branch of Italian arms, from lack of money, was very fertile in ideas, and in May, 1918, I went over to Milan to see experiments with a new scheme by which, on the occasion of air raids, whole tracts of country were to be brilliantly illuminated by flares, thus enabling scouts to pick out and destroy the clumsy and helpless bombers. At Gallarate, outside Milan, the experiment was made with considerable success, even we, on the ground, being able to see Capronis 8,000 or 9,000 feet up. It was on this

same aerodrome in the afternoon that we had witnessed the tragic fate of a crack Italian test pilot, who was making an incredible display with a new pattern of Nieuport Macchi machine. Suddenly, during a climbing turn, at only about 700 feet above the school buildings, he tried a shade too much. A ribbon of fabric fluttered from the upper plane. The frames collapsed and he fell, half burying himself with the machine in the ground.

The return journey from Milan to the Piave was made to include a visit to Pavia, where Francis I lost "all but honour," and to the Certosa, surely the most perfect monument of its kind in Italy, and the northern city of Bergamo, the birthplace of Donizetti. It will be seen, therefore, that we did not suffer from monotony, and these more distant spots were no richer in interest than the immediate neighbourhood of our quarters. Vicenza is the centre of Palladian masterpieces, being the home of the architect himself. Lord Cavan's office was at a colonnaded villa set by Palladio on the foothills of the Alps and seen to wonderful advantage from some neighbouring peak or from the air. The Market Hall at Vicenza is, perhaps, the master's *chef-d'œuvre*, and by it he stands in stone, turning his back on his great work, La Rotonda, displaying on an adjacent hill its Ionic porticoes and stately proportions. What can be said of its wonderful internal decoration? Do the gods and heroes on the walls, drawn in amazing perspective and seeming full of action, yet need something else to make them alive? Then the painter introduces a high relief in plaster or wood planted up over the cornice or in some dark angle. The tip of an angel's wing or a

saint's forearm is often seen stuck thus on the vaulting of an Italian church. The chimneypieces at La Rotonda are magnificent in the extreme, but, alas! the whole building appears to be going to ruin.

We could revel in the beauties of the sixteenth or the thirteenth centuries as we chose, for our journey was concluded via the wonderful walled city of Marostica, in the neighbourhood of the birthplace of that Eccelino who betrayed Padua with a kiss, a fact duly recorded in brass. Would that in our country we were freer with our public tablets! Not a cast-iron plate giving the names of the Sub-Committee of the Borough Council who set up the drinking fountain, but the neatly-turned phrases which the Italians delight in and which are at once a result and a cause of their intense love of country. Take this simple tribute on the famous café at Padua to the two Pedrocchis, one of whom "with the skill of an artist erected this building," which the other "with the heart of a philanthropist dedicated to the service of his fellow-townsmen." Or the inscription on the ancient Palace of Eccelino: "The centuries have respected this house which Eccelino erected about 1190." The Austrians did not follow the example of the Centuries, for they cracked the walls and broke the windows with their bombs.

This passion for their own city shown by even the humblest Italians is a lesson to an Englishman. A promising conversational opening is praise of the province from which your companion comes. But you must start with some light. I remember having great difficulty with a colonel. I tried him with

Tuscany ; Lombardy ; then Venice in a warm passage ; no result ; Rome ; useless ; the gay South, adding a personal tribute from my own experience ; still a blank ; Sicily ; a failure ; and finally I was driven weakly to ask the direct question, " And where might be the Signor Colonello's home ? " He was from Sardinia, the one province which had escaped my eulogia.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### TUSCAN CITIES

DURING the year 1918 the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps came under a common management. It was desirable, therefore, for us to get more closely into touch with the Service engaged at Taranto, first in connection with the Adriatic Barrage and afterwards in the persistent bombing of Cattaro. And as I had been on Commodore Sueter's staff, I was selected to make the liaison. Time did not press, so I determined to go south by the west coast, that is, via Florence and Rome, and return by the east coast which, at this time, was the principal route for troops and stores. In the west I should have a chance of visiting a few cities I had not yet seen, and although the east coast was dull enough as far north as Ancona, it afforded the opportunity of a glimpse at Rimini and Ravenna.

Accordingly, I set out from Padua on the afternoon of August 23rd. My kit was a soldier's knapsack. To travel with luggage is at all times irksome, and in war time impossible. I wished to leave the beaten track and get more into touch with the Italians, including, I hoped, as I was deserting the Zona di Guerra, a good

many civilians. For journeying in these byways it was essential to travel light. My plan for making acquaintances was to affect a pervasive affability persisted in until repulsed.

My first train-mates were a party of American Socialists of the Gompers School, bent upon convincing the Italian workmen of the justice and necessity of the War. Mr. Louis Kopelin, editor of a Socialist organ in the States, made an entertaining companion, and from him I received a forecast, which turned out to be more accurate than much I had heard from political friends, of what would happen at the election impending at home. Thus was interest sustained during my journey to Bologna, where my first night was spent. A stick, a pack and a waterproof made me independent of weather, porters and carriages. Such is the real luxury of travel.

Bologna on a summer morning is perfect. The colonnaded streets are like Padua, but much nobler; the high towers lean as truly as ever did the tower of Pisa, though they do not enjoy the same world-fame; and at every turn there are vistas of quaint, twisting, sunlit streets. When I add that a strolling 'cellist on the pavement beguiled the hour spent on my modest luncheon, it will be seen that my cup of happiness was overflowing.

The train for Florence was too full for me at first to find a seat, but a young officer, leaning out of a window, informed me in good Italian that there was room in his carriage. Thus I found myself a fellow-traveller with three young Czechs, gallant youths who had been taken prisoners in Serbia and were now engaged in active operations against the Austrians;



keeping up, as they told me, only from time to time and by good fortune, communication with their relatives in Bohemia. Their studious courtesy was very pleasing, and I was not a little amused at their desire to appear intimate with English manners and customs. They preferred to speak in English rather than in Italian, and one asked me gravely whether the racing at Derby was continued during the war. The other told me with pride that the "7th" was very fond of Bohemia. I had to cudgel my brains to discover that by the "7th" was meant our late King Edward.

The train was bound for Florence, but I had decided that, for the sake of the Della Robbias, it was essential to break the journey at Pistoia. Accordingly, alighting and leaving my pack comfortably at the cloak-room, I strolled into this interesting little town. Unfortunately, the zeal of the Austrian rulers of Tuscany, whilst it unquestionably conferred no small benefits on the community, ran here, as elsewhere, rather too freely in the direction of baroque restorations. There is, however, a Della Robbia altar and a Pisano pulpit in one of the churches and a Town Hall with a decorated ceiling which surpasses belief for its gorgeousness. It was there I fell a victim to the attentions of a good lady who was conducting a War charity sale-of-work, and saw a not-to-be-let-slip chance of cementing the friendship between Italy and England. So I was shown all the articles which had been prepared for the sale, in which, despite the painstaking hospitality of my hostess, I fear I showed less interest than in the commonplace monuments of the town, which had not even anything to do with the

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THE ENEMY HONOUR OUR DEAD. PHOTOGRAPH DROPPED BY THE AUSTRIAN FLYING CORPS. [Page 248.]

War. After dining in a side street I was able to catch the evening train to Florence, and there was shepherded by a police corporal, the first Englishman I had addressed for three days, who reminded me that he had been used to control the crowds on polling day in St. George's-in-the-East.

In the morning, at dawn, I took train to Lucca, chiefly remarkable for its fine walls, which, though they would cramp the city, did it show any desire to grow, impart dignity to it and provide the inhabitants with the most glorious boulevard. St. Michael, with bright metal wings, protrudes from the façade of his name-church in the square, but despite this adornment the church of St. Frediano far surpasses it in beauty. The mosaic on the façade is brilliant Byzantine work. The interior is no less splendid. The capitals are all pure Romanesque. There is a Della Robbia altar and a wonderful Byzantine font with a high relief procession of stone knights and followers encircling its ample proportions, big enough to permit of total immersion.

Throughout my service in Italy I was repeatedly impressed with the courtesy of the inhabitants. Anxious to talk and willing to help, they were yet determined not to intrude. Of this I had one experience at Lucca. Tired out with my early rise I fell asleep on the walls, and yet, though an obvious stranger, I was allowed to rest undisturbed. When I awoke, a neighbour sitting by me entered into conversation. He could not say enough in praise of the English. We were "the guarantee of victory." "You see," he explained to me, "the English have

never been beaten"—a view of history on which I made no unsettling comment. I could not forgo another visit to St. Frediano. He was an Irishman. Irish patron saints are not uncommon in Italy. There is one in Florence, and the cathedral at Taranto is, as I have already said, dedicated to St. Cataldo, an Irish crusader stopped on his way home and given local work by a discerning Pope of the day.

I spent a pleasant evening in the square at Lucca with my face averted from the fat stone statue of a Bourbon Princess who, as a large notice avers, gave the water supply to the city. Here I wasted a good many compliments anent Lucca and Tuscany generally on a casual acquaintance who turned out to be a rather supercilious refugee from Udine. My politeness was not entirely unrewarded, however. I explained to a neighbour my view that Italian influence had probably hastened America's decision to come into the war. "Maybe," he replied, "maybe, but more likely it was just the Lucchesi; there is hardly a town in the world"—this impressively—"where you won't find people from Lucca."

That night I slept at Pisa, whose beauties I shall not attempt to describe. The cathedral is the most complete Italian work of art. It does not offend our British love of tidiness as do so many of the Italian monuments; churches without façades and façades which are nothing but a high wall propped up from behind and intended solely to exhibit decorative effects. The chains of the old Port of Pisa which hang in the Campo Santo, and which were only returned by the Genoese forty years ago, remind us

that the United Kingdom of Italy is the baby among the Great Powers.

From Pisa I was bound, via Florence, to Arezzo, the birthplace of Guido, who invented musical notation. Arezzo is built on many little hills, so that all the streets go up and down. The most interesting of its churches is the Santa Maria. Here I fell in with a very talkative sacristan busy taking down a catafalque which had been in use on the previous day for the obsequies of some local worthy. The sacristan, who was delighted to meet an English officer, instantly laid aside his work and, judging me to be sympathetic, as indeed I was, gave me the full benefit of his views on the restoration of Santa Maria, which, it appeared, was first undertaken about sixty years ago by the Government and had been proceeding at intervals since. The church has a perfectly square façade, consisting of three superimposed rows of arched colonnades of the thirteenth century. Inside, the round arches and great simplicity give it the appearance of one of our own northern cathedrals. In the eighteenth century the distinguished Aretine Vassari was ordered to carry out the restoration, which he did most freely in the baroque style. Frescoes were whitewashed and horrible monuments to forgotten nobodies were interspersed with altars so as to conceal all the fine stonework of the edifice. The Government has now cleared this stuff away. I say the Government, but it is the Government with the ardent and enthusiastic support of my friend the sacristan. He speaks of Vassari with lofty intellectual contempt. He still remembers something of the

earlier state of corruption, and shows with glee a hideous specimen of baroque taste which he *proprio motu* has deprived of its place of honour and shoved out of the church into a vestry. It was no use attempting to fee my friend. He refused on the broad international ground that the British were saving Italy.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### PERUGIA—ASSISI—ORVIETO—CASSINO

FROM Arezzo, by making a change at Terontola, you pass by the Trasimene Lake, the name of which takes you back over 2,000 years, and arrive at Perugia. Let me say again that those who visit Italy and leave out the Italians lose half the pleasure they might have. A knowledge of the language, even though slight, enables one to understand an entirely new point of view. I, in my zeal, made it a practice to outdo the Italians at their own *forte*, namely, interest in the affairs of others. For instance, at Arezzo, the porter who put my bag in the train had a long story to tell me of his own experiences as an emigrant, not in America, but in Northern Europe, whither he went, not because the pay was good, but simply for the opportunity to see more of the world. This colloquy was a better occupation than bullying the bookstall clerk for not having a week-old copy of the *Times*.

Perugia, like Orvieto and many another Umbrian city, is nobly set on a hill. I suppose the Italians, years ago, objected to the trains as much as did our own country squires, for here, as in other places, the railway hardly approaches the city. The Town Hall at Perugia is well set off by wonderful twin steps



surmounted by the bronze griffins of Umbria. In the Picture Gallery above, is a bust of Perugino, a coarse, unattractive-looking man ; a blatant atheist, they say, though the painter of some of the most wonderful religious subjects. There is food for thought in that.

From Perugia to Assisi, a quiet town steeped in an atmosphere of profound piety and sleepy repose. Everything is dominated by St. Francis, enshrined in his triple church. A Spanish friar explained to me the Giotto and Cimabue frescoes. Personal relics of St. Francis there are too, but the glass windows in the uppermost of the three churches seem the most lovely thing, for there is little enough old glass to be found in Italy. St. Francis shared his ministry with St. Claire, who founded the order of nuns of St. Francis called the Poor Claires. Her church is wonderful both inside and out, and its round arches remind one, like so many of the churches of Apulia, of our own Norman edifices. Once there were frescoes in the church, but they were destroyed because it was thought they distracted the nuns. A crucifix which spoke to St. Francis is kept as a precious relic. The body of St. Claire can clearly be seen under the altar.

The town was full of holiday-makers enjoying themselves with the modest economy characteristic of the Italians. At my little hotel the show-piece was a real live Marchesa, who mingled graciously with the company on the tacit understanding that they should listen sympathetically to her singing, which contract we all loyally respected.

From Perugia there is a way of rejoining the Florence-Rome line by means of a motor which makes a four-hour journey over the Umbrian mountains. I

suppose this omnibus trip was as near an approach to the old stage coach as could be found anywhere to-day. The driver had a thousand friends in every hamlet, and each one had a hundred messages for him. "Don't forget the medicine," cried one woman as we moved out of the village. "Don't pay more than twenty-five for the shoes," shouted a man. "Get me one to match this," said another, thrusting into the conductor's hand a broken lamp glass, which being placed on the seat beside me, gave me a Damien's Bed for the rest of the journey.

We stopped at Masciano, and as I was probably the first English officer who had visited the town during the War, I was the centre of a good deal of interest and entered somewhat portentously into conversation with the local quidnuncs. I felt sure they would dine out for some months on the war news I provided. Through the early evening we continued over the rolling hills which afforded views in all directions till at eight o'clock, having mounted a winding road, we thundered in through the gates of Orvieto.

Orvieto has one treasure, the cathedral. Nothing else was I able to discover. At seven in the morning, therefore, which was the only time I could give, for the south-going train left at eight, I went to see the great masterpiece. The sacristan here, typical in his enthusiasm and learning of the wonderful tribe, is a painter and has published a book of copies of the frescoes, Giotto's, Fra Angelico's and Signorelli's. He showed me the east window, which is a fine specimen of fourteenth century glass. The other windows are glazed in alabaster, which sheds a golden light through the cathedral. This sacristan

was such a great man that I hesitated about the usual little material courtesy, but as he showed no reciprocal shyness it duly changed hands.

I have rarely visited a spot so remote from the turmoil of the workaday world. The town seemed dead. Here and there an opening window or a little curl of smoke showed a household astir. From the wall, for the cathedral, like that of Arezzo, is perched on the wall, is seen the panorama of the country. The main doors of the church were open, and in the immense interior priests were faintly heard beginning the service. On the steps outside a fat old woman was seated, softly persuading a parrot which, with occasional whistles, was sedately waddling up the cathedral steps. That was my parting view of Orvieto.

At Rome I was charged with some business with which I need not weary the patient reader. For the next stop I had decided on Monte Cassino, which, though it is on the direct route from Rome south, is rarely seen by the English. As I discovered by examining the visitors' book here and at many other famous places, these Meccas, though attractive to French officers, received scant attention from our own Army.

St. Benedict's great foundation is on a hill some 1,200 feet above the little railway station, and my scheme had been to arrive at eight in the evening and walk or drive up the hill, a matter of some two hours' work, to be received at dusk by the kindly monks, whose frugal supper I pictured myself as gratefully sharing and with whom I should spend a night or two in profitable retreat. The first dis-

illusionment occurred at once, in the form of a fierce dispute with the cabman at the station, who was determined to charge nearly five times the correct fare. No matter, I would take as guide a village boy and, with my handy knapsack, make the journey to the monastery on foot. It was, perhaps, more fitting that the weary pilgrim should arrive at night-fall. The smile of welcome would be the sweeter. I was feeling "good." I was already half a monk myself.

It was not quite eleven when we reached the top of the hill, trembling with fatigue and streaming with perspiration. My little Antonio scrambled up the wall to reach the bell, which he pulled lustily. The bell clanged so as to be heard throughout the whole length of the immense building. I hammered with my stick on the door, but though there were lights in the windows, half-an-hour of these attacks produced no result. At last a monk appeared at an opening and explained that everyone had gone to bed and it was impossible to let us in. I felt monstrously hurt. It was not that one has any right to expect to be entertained when arriving unannounced at midnight ; it was that the conduct was an affront to my dreams. But all was useless, the monk was adamant, and it seemed as if we must spend the night in the open or return to the village. However, at a neighbouring cottage we found an old bearded gentleman of benevolent aspect just lighting the candle to go to bed. I had hardly explained the beginning of our story when he opened wide the door and insisted on finding a room for each of us. There was little to eat in the house, but we were glad of anything, and this

kindly man put us to rest refreshed physically and much more refreshed at heart, for he adorned his surprising example of hospitality with an impassioned denunciation of the militarism of the Prussians. The next day I went round the monastery, much of which has been redecorated by the Beurem monks in their own style of art. Scenes in the life of the great founder, illustrated in a half-Egyptian style and set off by bronzes, symbolising the Evangelists in the usual figures, presented the appearance of the interior of one of the Sakhara pyramids rather than that of a Christian monument. The church of St. Benedict was built in the sixteenth century and is rich in the extreme. The cloisters and courtyard are by Bramante, and the church is so set in the sky that, from the steps which lead down into the courtyard, looking over the roofs of the surrounding buildings, there is nothing to be seen but the prospect of distant mountains. I left Monte Cassino without regret. True I had been most courteously shown round and most kindly treated, but it had betrayed my hope,

“Oft shall the pilgrim lift the latch  
And share my meal—a welcome guest.”

Relief from this chilly atmosphere was sought by a *détour* to Naples. It is impossible for the traveller from Cassino to Taranto, who knows what discomfort Taranto has in store, to resist the temptation to take a glimpse at Naples. There with an orgy I compensated for my fasting with the Benedictines. The Italians call the country south of Naples their African colony, but so far as the climate is concerned it is a

## PERUGIA—ASSISI—ORVIETO—CASSINO 267

libel on Africa. My business being concluded at Taranto, the question was how to get to Brindisi, which was the next stage of my journey. To go in a train I must leave at four in the morning and spend ten hours with changes and delays on the journey. I selected the modern way. At midday I stepped into a D.H. 9 and at 12.25 stepped out of it at Brindisi, an enjoyable journey giving a comprehensive view of both the Adriatic and the Ionian Seas. Who can doubt the successful future of such a means of travel ?

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE ADRIATIC COAST

BRINDISI, however, was only a stage, and the thing to do was to push on north through Foggia. What an inferno Foggia is! How did the Emperor Frederick II come to select it to reside in?

Ancona, when I arrived there, which I did after twelve midnight, was in complete darkness. Not a glimmer of light was allowed. This rule was due to the belief that the enemy air raids from Pola were guided by Austrian spies in the town, a belief which accounted for my unpleasant adventure. I could find but one man, in the Egyptian night of the deserted streets, of whom to ask the way to an hotel. In reply to my inquiries he began to put to me so many questions that, tired and short of temper, I ceased answering and became interrogative in turn, asking him what he meant by his cross-examination. His answer, though an affront, made a friend of me for life, for he explained that there were a great many Austrian spies in the town and he thought I spoke Italian too well for a so-called Englishman! I left him with this soothing farewell, and being dog-tired was soon asleep in the hotel when I found it. But

my friend evidently did not relax his vigilant interest, for I was awakened early in the morning with some inquiries from the police for further particulars as to who and what I was.

Ancona selected Cavour when statue building was prevalent and was content with tablets to Garibaldi and the King. The churches are full of reminders of the Austrian rule and of the connection with the Slav races who live across the Adriatic. The cathedral crowns a hill on a little promontory and commands a wide view comprising the city and miles of coast of the whitest sand and the bluest water. This 2,000-year-old monument, the seat of the ancient Bishopric, could be put, all standing, inside the church of a Venetian hamlet such as Citadella ; thus do churches wax as religion wanes. It forms a Greek cross, but an altar added at one end gives it the appearance of a Latin cross the wrong way up. Near by is a small campanile which unfortunately air raids have damaged. As for the inhabitants of Ancona, they are moderns, they had no interest in their famous Byzantine jewel—air raids was all their talk ; every scratch they could and would show you.

What a wise plan it is to get into conversation with everyone ! Without my persevering politeness, I should not have made the acquaintance of my Italian friend at Ancona Station, a fat, elderly, very subordinate officer charged with what are called " R.T.O. " duties. We had a long talk about the War and its justice and then he timidly asked me whether I was a " regular " or a " civilian. " Once reassured on this point he opened out very fully. He was a country



solicitor, and a land agent ; he had a small business in olive oil and had been a great man, I gathered, in his own town. And now, he asked, what was he ? Doing menial work, the sport and pastime of so-called superiors. I was cordially sympathetic. We agreed that war is a bad thing for the honest civilian. This bond of friendship was not only pleasing in itself but of some material advantage, as it moved my friend to admit me to a special Italian troop train which got me to Pesaro much sooner than would otherwise have been the case. Pesaro was my goal, for I was determined to get out there and make a dash for Urbino, and one of my railway-carriage friends had told me that there was an omnibus to be caught in connection with the very train we were in. It was true Urbino was off the direct route of my journey, but was it not Raffael's birthplace ?

Out at Pesaro, then, not without a misgiving lest I should fall into the hands of some conscientious English Transport Officer. The Italians I did not fear, for their officials, especially the Carabinieri, showed us every consideration at all times ; we were asked for nothing, neither papers, leave warrants, nor even railway tickets ; a general order seemed to have been issued that we should pass everywhere unchallenged ; nay, more, accommodated and welcomed.

I duly caught the omnibus and soon we were climbing hills, and in the distance, from the saddle between two summits, peeped Urbino with its palace and cathedral, now seen, now hidden, as we twisted and turned up the mountain road. We entered through

a gate and at sunset, as all such towns should be entered, and stopped in a colonnaded street, right under the frowning palace, before the only hotel, the Albergo d'Italia, from whose old-fashioned rooms views are to be had of miles of surrounding country.

Duke Frederick of the 1400's was the first great man in Urbino. Perhaps it was a recollection of his very well-known portrait which produced on my mind an impression growing deeper and deeper as I observed the folk in the town itself, an impression of something grandiose, something imposing of countenance, and yet what was it ?

Even the waiter had a familiar look, a subtle something which inspired an inward respect. What could it be ? A visit to the ducal palace and a glance at the familiar picture of the greatest of the Montefeltrines and the secret was out. It was, of course, the Roman nose, that unmistakable organ, most familiar, perhaps, in the famous Francesca at Florence. Everybody at Urbino has a Roman nose ! A single day's visit convinced me of that. And this is not a negligible thing. A fine nose confers lordship. But let the Great Master of the subject speak. What does Cyrano say ?

*"Un grand nez est proprement l'indice d'un homme affable, bon, courtois, spirituel, libéral, courageux."*

Lustre is shed on the name of Urbino by two others besides the Duke Frederick, Raffael and Bramante. Raffael's father, the painter, was attracted to settle here by the liberal patronage of the Duke's family.

His house is not very interesting. The room is shown in which the genius was born, but it contains only photographic reproductions of his work. Alas ! When Urbino was handed over to Urban VIII most of the treasures of the town were carried away to Rome.

The Duke Frederick was the builder of the great palace, wonderful not for what it actually is so much as for what it clearly was intended to be ; just as Siena Cathedral, glorious as it is, is most deeply impressive from the fact that its great nave is only the transept of the original design. In this Palace the sixty-four carved doorways, the decoration of the external walls hardly begun, the paintings in the Duke's study, all hint at the glorious conception which was in the mind of the artist. The Duke's study is lined with the portraits of the world's twenty greatest men. Is the series complete ? I have acquaintances who would think it does them an injustice.

The present condition of the Palace at Urbino is a fine tribute to the work of the Italian Government in looking after ancient monuments. Where original paintings cannot be acquired and hung, photographs are shown of the pictures and tapestries which were here in the days of Urbino's glory. Barroci is much in evidence, and there are two Titians. A curiosity which sticks in the mind is that in "The Annunciation," although the angel is speaking to Mary, the Virgin's attention seems almost entirely occupied by a lifelike tabby cat at her side. The most admired work of art outside the Palace is the wonderful marble Deposition by Gian Bologna, rather crudely set off in



FUNERAL OF BRITISH PILOTS. PHOTOGRAPH DROPPED BY THE AUSTRIAN FLYING CORPS.  
[Page 360.]

to you  
attention

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the cathedral crypt against a black painted wooden background.

From the top of the hill above Raffael's house can be seen, set on a precipitous cliff, the three towers which are at once the distant landmark and the coat-of-arms of the independent Republic of San Marino. This, too, clamoured to be visited and it could be reached from Rimini, which had always been included in the itinerary.

Rimini, though by name one of the best-known Italian towns, is by no means one of the most interesting. Perhaps it is the earthquakes which are the cause of its poverty in old buildings, though they have left undisturbed the fine arch, 27 B.C., which in its grandeur and grace throws into the shade even the best works of the Renaissance. But though monuments are rare there is a good atmosphere here for a politician, for the river Rubicon is no distance away, and after crossing it Julius Caesar assembled his troops in the market-place at Rimini and won them over with a speech. The air, in fact, seems favourable to successful oratory, for it was here too that St. Anthony of Padua preached to the fishes which came from the sea to hear him, in proof of which a little tabernacle is erected in the public square.

The great Riminese family is the Malatesta, and it was Paolo of that stock and Francesca da Polenta who were the characters of the deathless romance. It was from Francesca's nephew that Dante heard the story—a fact which refutes our notion that nothing can be romantic which is not set in an age remote from the writer. The Malatesta Castle is practically

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a ruin, but the church of Sigismund, 1484, is an alluring specimen of Florentine Renaissance at its richest and best.

From Rimini I carried out my plan of going by omnibus to San Marino. The city is perched on a rock 2,000 feet high, on which are the three towers I had seen from Urbino. The last thousand feet is sheer ascent. San Marino is "independent," and its relations with the Central Empires were somewhat undefined. Indeed, I was tickled by the possibility of being myself interned for entering a neutral country, but I was told that the sending out of an ambulance manned by the citizens had been construed into an act of war by the Austrians. In truth, San Marino is not interesting; it is merely a freak. The modern Captains are too much concerned with making it a tourist resort to assign the right proportion to its ancient history and its strange survival of independence. Founded by a hermit in the time of Diocletian, it struggled through the Middle Ages in freedom, though sometimes falling into the possession of enemies. Napoleon respected its independence, and one very creditable incident in its history is that it sheltered Garibaldi in 1844. A later Treaty with the Kingdom of Italy has left it its own "laws" and its own postage stamps. That is all there is to say about it.

The day of my visit was the day of the Fair. In the Borgo the free citizens of the State had assembled. There were collected, too, more milk-white beasts than I ever saw in my life. Chaises pushed into fields or drawn up by the road, donkeys, horses and mules

tied up, women chattering or bargaining with pedlars, formed a real market scene. The motor 'bus created no small stir. The mules reared, the bullocks backed and shied, the people shrieked and shouted, everything was noise and confusion, as we passed up to the Città. The Fair was our last touch of romance, for once in the citadel we fell into the hands of a professional guide. He insisted on showing us the not unhandsome Government House, rebuilt in 1894, the modern church and the large marble statue with a wooden look, said to represent "Liberty," and paid for by a middle-aged German lady (after whom it may have been modelled) who in return was declared to be Duchess of Aquaviva.

There was just one touch of romance, however. In the tower of the prison on the very summit of the crag, looking down a sheer precipice to survey half Italy, we saw at a window the wistful faces of two captives.

The return journey in the omnibus was of the usual family-party kind. Coming up, as I had no ticket, I had been smuggled through by a kind Italian officer, so that he and I were already old friends before we started home. I had others, too. A jolly country-woman sitting by me would have me, as a stranger, share the drink she had provided for the journey. At one of the villages on the road a fat, prosperous-looking passenger bought cheeses, chickens, lard and I know not what else, real treasures in those days of scarcity. There was, however, the exciseman at Rimini to face. Our fat friend—for he was our friend, had not we known him for over two hours?—



ally produced the smallest of his cheeses and handed over a few halfpence. We all smiled. The country-woman nudged me and winked. Ten minutes later we were at the Malatesta Castle. Tumbling out, the party shook hands and in reply to many *au revoirs* I heard the pretty and familiar courtesy "*Grazia della sua campagna.*"

Ravenna demanded a peep on the way home, just enough to whet one's appetite for a proper visit when peace should come. It is entirely different from any other Italian city, for it is Eastern. The Arians flourished here, and every now and then you will see the figure of a Christ without an aureole. The dates are surprising; the centuries never run into double figures; and the patron saints with their unfamiliar names are new acquaintances, and not our old friends of the rest of Italy. The Government have done wonders with the St. Apollinare, which is the most famous monument. Here is a tablet showing where Otho made submission to the Popes, like the pillar outside Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome, reminiscent of the mighty days of real Temporal Power. St. Apollinare, however, has suffered, like all the rest of Ravenna, from the floods. Even in Roman times the difficulty was to drain the city. In the church of St. Francis, the Rector showed me the crypt in which there was always three feet of water.

The San Vitale, an octagonal church, is the best example I know of successful restoration. Most wonderful revelations are following the clearing away of the rubbish of the ages. But tastes differ, and when I visited the old Arian Baptistery, which, having

been turned into a Christian church, had been overlaid in the usual way with every sort of meretricious ornament and was now resuming its primitive simplicity, the nice old custodian remarked, frowning on the skilful restoration, "Yes, sir, the place was very pretty once" (taking my modest fee); "thank you, sir, but with all this"—a comprehensive nod—"I am sure I don't know what it is coming to."

## CHAPTER XL

### ON SECRET SERVICE

It was in the middle of the summer of 1918 that I passed temporarily, for all practical purposes, under the command of the Italian Army, in order to initiate a new enterprise. We were to prove the possibility of dropping an agent over the line at night by means of a parachute. At first the practical obstacles seemed insuperable, and even now there are some who will hardly believe that a parachute can be used from a fast-flying machine, but of these things I will defer speaking for a moment.

The advantage of being able to deposit informants without trouble in any place desired, and especially in the actual zone of war, is manifest. Compared with the laborious plan of sending them to evade sentries, cross frontiers and then work slowly forward, the virtue of the direct method of dropping them at once where the information is to be obtained by personal observation, is obvious. Even the grave risks involved were more than justified by the value of the immediate first-hand reports.

As everyone knows, aeroplanes had actually come down, deposited agents and flown away again. In Italy men were sometimes landed in the invaded area

in fields known very well to the Italians and were picked up again by aircraft when their task was done. The dangers of this work in the dark were considerable, because if once the enemy could identify the field which was used, nothing was easier than to fix a wire on the ground, which, when the machine hit it, would terminate in a second the career of pilot and agent alike.

But our particular "stunt" was to be, not landing agents, but dropping them from aeroplanes in parachutes. For the sake of those who are not familiar with this phase of war activities I will run through some of the main difficulties which had to be faced.

First, are you to release the apparatus high or low? Here you are between Scylla and Charybdis. The danger of parachuting is that the ropes by which the performer is attached may become twisted round the fabric, the parachute may not open, and the whole thing may fall like a stone. The great safeguard against this danger, paradoxical though it may seem, is height, for the higher you are, the longer time there is for the parachute to make up its mind to act. One might therefore say "fly high," but there is another consideration. You want to drop your agent in the right spot; this means dropping from a low altitude. The parachute takes many seconds to descend, especially if it is a big one, and during that time the wind may blow the man a great distance, perhaps miles, and he may finally alight helplessly in the very midst of the enemy. To calculate this wind is impossible. It is difficult enough to make a precise hit with a bomb where you have sights, are working in daylight, and are launching an object

which is very heavy for its small bulk. But how can you sight a parachute? The thing cannot be done. The only course, therefore, is to get as low as you possibly can so as to fire the man, as you might say, point blank at the spot in which you intend him to alight. It is clear, therefore, that we are between two opposing difficulties: if you go high you cannot drop the man where he will be safe; if you go low there is risk that the parachute will not open and your agent be "wasted."

I ought to say that the type of apparatus the Italians had purchased was a special one, a careful examination of which was of the greatest interest as showing the elaborate and painstaking effort which had been necessary to overcome difficulties. Those who have never studied the matter can have no suspicion of how nicely the adjustments are worked out. The quality of the fabric must be of the best and every single one of the numerous attachments which constitute the parachute itself must be folded in such a way as to eliminate any risk of its becoming entangled with the others. In our parachutes, cords had been abandoned and flat tapes substituted. These tapes were all numbered, and every eyelet in the fabric was numbered to correspond. In folding the parachute every number had to be attached to a like number. In this way there was no possible risk of making the fatal blunder of getting a tape "crossed" and tied to the wrong hole, which would have spelt disaster.

There is another point. As the man is dropped, the violence of his fall has to snatch the parachute from its fastenings. This means a dangerous jerk.

There must, therefore, be a shock-absorber to take it up. That is a part of the harness, essential for the safety of the man himself. As to this harness, it must be so arranged as to leave the hands and legs free ; it must be secure ; there must be no risk of it becoming entangled in the under-carriage of the aeroplane as the fall takes place ; and, most important of all, the agent must be able to throw it off the instant he reaches the ground. Otherwise the unfortunate man may be dragged by the wind over field after field with danger to life and limb, to say nothing of the dreadful risk of becoming an object of attention, and finding himself " against a wall " next morning. A device was made, therefore, similar to the safety belt in an aeroplane from which the man could disengage himself instantly. As an observer in a kite balloon I had been provided with the usual knife in the girdle in order to sever the ropes attached to the parachute, in case of a misadventure such as I have just described. This knife is an integral part of the observer's equipment, but it is not to be compared for ingenuity with the method of release we were using.

So much for some of the difficulties of the ordinary apparatus. Now we must come to the main obstacle, which made people say that it was impossible to launch anyone from an aeroplane travelling at a high speed. Where was the parachute to be housed ? How would you prevent the wind catching it and blowing it out ? Was the man to jump clear ? How were you to provide that he would do it at the right moment ? Would he not catch in some part of the

machine ? All these were more than mere debating points ; they were very practical difficulties. However, they were overcome.

I need not describe in detail the particular form of aluminium device, rather in the shape of an umbrella, which housed the parachute, protecting it from the wind as it hung beneath the nacelle. A special metal fitting was necessary in the machine we were to use, and this at the critical moment was lowered by means of a pulley and held taut by cords below the aeroplane so that the whole parachute became fixed or rigged underneath the lowest point of the wheels of the under-carriage and the tail-skids. I may add that by adroitly stalling, the pilot was able to assist considerably in protecting the parachutist from the risk of hitting the machine as he was launched.

The last and chief difficulty was how to persuade the agent to drop at the right moment. I cannot conceive of anyone having sufficient self-control to throw himself from a moving aeroplane. I suppose that the observer in a kite balloon feels no difficulty about jumping out when the balloon is on fire, but certainly I never felt any desire to get out of the basket of a balloon that was not on fire. How much harder would it be for a man to leap from a machine going at perhaps eighty knots ? The solution was considerably to relieve him of the embarrassment of choice. We arranged that the agent should sit in a cockpit on a flap-door hinged at the sides and opening in the middle. This floor was held in place by bolts controlled by a rope connected with the observer's seat. The result was that it was the observer who

decided when the bolt was to be drawn and the agent, waiting presumably with some qualms, at the right moment found himself suddenly with nothing under him and thus launched into the future. The performance, in fact, was similar in its mechanics to that carried out by Mr. Billington in the course of his lugubrious duties.



## CHAPTER XLI

BARKER, V.C.

I NEED make no secret of the outline of this work of our Allies' Secret Service. It is well known to the Italian public. Suffice it to say that we were employed by them merely to drop one agent successfully and then hand over the whole enterprise.

An Italian pilot had been experimenting, and there were several types of machine being tried to see which was the best suited. Obviously the way to test the device for supporting the parachute, to try the trap-doors, and generally to experiment with the whole apparatus, was to drop someone and see what happened. First we used a Caproni biplane with two pilots and three engines—a "tractor" each side and a "pusher" in the middle. From this machine the agent would have to drop dead in the track of the central propeller. A trial made with a dummy man resulted in wrecking the central propeller and one of the fuselages, and very nearly ended in disaster. It was thus obvious that it was impossible to drop anyone from an aeroplane with three engines, because one of them was bound to be in the dead centre and that was the exact line in which the agent was to

fall ; unless, indeed, he dropped from the wings, and this everyone steadily refused to do.

Another type of aircraft was therefore resorted to, a twin engine, S.P. 4, with a nacelle in the centre containing a seat for the pilot in the middle, one for the observer in the bow, and behind the pilot, out of reach of him and the observer, a cockpit for the parachutist himself. This machine had just been decided on and two officers had actually made descents by parachute, when, after much entreaty, I was given leave to take part in the operation.

The first thing that was clear was that the Italian pilot would not do. He was not used to night flying, and it was quite doubtful whether he could have found his way, to say nothing of landing and taking off, without assistance at least from the moon. Now, to fly in moonlight was to diminish by 80 per cent. the agent's chances of reaching the ground unseen. True, moonlight made it easier for the aviators, but we had to distribute the risk fairly and not allow dangers to be heaped on the parachutist, who was playing the hero's part, merely in order to save risk to the others.

Having received consent to change the *personnel*, I naturally seized the opportunity of becoming, as observer, an active participator in the enterprise, and proposed to Colonel Barker that he should take on the job of pilot. He willingly fell in with the suggestion. Colonel Barker's name and record are so well known that I need not say much about them. At the time of which I am speaking he had not yet won the Victoria Cross, but he had accumulated the Distinguished Service Order and three Military

Crosses, as well as sundry French and Italian decorations. He was the most undefeated optimist I ever knew, which was no doubt the spiritual secret of his success as an air fighter. Any enterprise on which he embarked, from having been a somewhat scaring venture whose partners had given only a sort of shivering assent, became under the influence of his magnetism a glowing chance of glory, to be gratefully welcomed ; and the imagination was set to work, not to reduce the dangers, but to improve the opportunities for gaining renown. When Barker joined the Board, so to speak, the whole thing got new life. The next difficulty was to persuade the authorities to lend him to the Italians, whose work all this was, for the loss of such an officer would have been a serious blow. In the end permission was secured on the ground that the really safe course was to put all the eggs in one basket ; in fact, to send the best men procurable so as almost to compel success.

There is imprinted very clearly on my mind the scene at the little conference at which maps were laid out and the preliminaries of the expedition discussed. It was presided over by Vaucour who, poor fellow, was shot down only two days later. Barker took to any new plan with the delight of a child, and it was decided that we should go over at once to a neighbouring aerodrome to try the quaint old S.P. 4 which we intended to use. It was indeed a pleasure to fly with this pilot. His skilful handling of this unwieldy apparatus, the pretty play he made with the two engines and his insistence on a little visit to a neighbouring aerodrome just to show off the machine to his friends, all indicated the sheer enjoyment of the

artist in the practice of his profession. Probably it was more pleasant for him than for me, for in these daylight essays I could devote my whole attention to watching the sagging and yawing of the struts and wires of our rickety and antediluvian aeroplane. During these flights we dropped a dummy, a lifelike sand-man attired in an old uniform and affectionately called "George," and he made several fine descents well on the spot aimed at. Soon we began to feel that things were shaping for a final success.

We were not sure at this time who was to be the agent to be employed, although there was no lack of competitors for the honour. On one occasion the Italian Intelligence Office brought over half-a-dozen Czech N.C.O.'s and men who had offered themselves for the job ; they looked grim enough in all conscience, and a special touch of determination seemed to be added by the knife which was worn in the belt as a part of the uniform of the Czech battalions. That these men should have volunteered for such a task roused me to enthusiastic admiration, for it was common talk how, after the fighting in June on the Piave, the Austrians had made short work of some hundreds of Czechs whom they had found fighting against them, and had treated, of course, as deserters and renegades.

The precise arrangements in connection with the agent not having been settled, we did not know exactly how much we should be required to do ; whether, for example, when the man was dropped, it was we who would be called upon to keep in touch with his news and to revictual him. In order to be prepared for anything that might be needed, I made

some flights in a Bristol fighter to practise sending pigeons and food. The idea was that this should be done by night and that the pigeons should go in a small basket, being dropped by means of a tiny parachute at a pre-arranged spot. The agent was to look out for a little red glowing torch fixed in the basket. However, nothing came of this, for the Italians themselves did the work in connection with supplies to their man when he was finally launched.

Univ. of  
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COLONEL BARKER, V.C., D.S.O., M.C., D.F.C.  
[Page 286.]

## CHAPTER XLII

### IF WE FAILED !

THERE were other preparations to make. The spot in which we were to drop the spy had to be selected. It was no easy task to pick out a field in the plain near enough to the numerous Austrian outposts, dumps and camps to be a good observation post and yet sufficiently secluded to give the man a reasonable chance of landing unnoticed. It would have been easy to find a solitary place among the mountains, but there is considerable danger in flying a big two-engine machine by night up narrow valleys, and the chance of success would have been much diminished by such a necessity. The navigation of the machine to the exact spot was obviously of the greatest importance, and we had also to think of getting back again to our aerodrome over ground totally invisible in the night.

The risk which the agent ran was heavy, of course. Had it been discovered how he had got down and what his purposes were, he would have received short shrift from the enemy. In the event of a forced descent we shared this risk, for the nacelle was unmistakably constructed to drop spies, the trap-doors in the back seat and the big aluminium launching disc



alone making this abundantly clear. We tried a great many experiments, therefore, with the twofold object, should we be forced to land, of being able to destroy the machine beyond recognition, and of ensuring, so far as we could, a return passage for ourselves as fugitives into our own lines.

To destroy the aeroplane we found that 10 lb. of guncotton packed in a wooden case would be more than ample. Indeed a trial made with the same quantity blew a thick sheet of corrugated iron into a field some hundreds of yards away and almost destroyed the life, as it did the quiet of mind, of the wife of a peace-loving Italian farmer. This guncotton was screwed on to the floor of the S.P. 4 between Barker and me. It was harmless in itself, for we discovered by experiments with rifle bullets that it would not have gone off had it even been hit by an A.A. shell. For exploding it we had two 4-foot lengths of slow match, with a detonator on each, rolled up and hung by my side in the nacelle. Thus in the case of need the destruction of our guilty belongings could be effected.

In the course of our investigations as to the best way of escaping should we by any chance make a forced landing, we saw a good deal of the working of the Italian Intelligence system. Among other incidents was a long motor drive to the Headquarters of the 3rd Army at Mogliano. Our business was as follows: The volunteer for the descent was a certain Captain di Carlo, a landowner whose estates lay between Conegliano and Vittorio. Di Carlo would have made an excellent agent, as all the peasantry knew him well, were his friends, and would willingly

have concealed him among them had he got down in safety. In fact, a brother of his was at this time on the other side, and had sent over no fewer than thirty-one pigeons giving information. For some reason, however, a hitch had occurred and we could not obtain consent for our Di Carlo to go. It was with the object of getting over this difficulty that our visit to Mogliano was made. We dropped into the section of the mess where the Intelligence men fed, and though it was ten o'clock at night, were given, as usual among the hospitable Italians, the best of good dinners. We found ourselves among a queer collection of folk, some in mufti but most in uniform and all freely decorated. These we learned were the officers who had been engaged in Secret Service, and some, indeed, were even then about to commence new adventures. One young fellow went round the room kissing affectionate farewells to his companions, as he was that night to be conveyed over the lines by means of a Voisin aeroplane and landed in a field on the enemy's side.

Our mission was unsuccessful. We were told, though the information turned out afterwards not to be very accurate, that Di Carlo's brother, attempting to return, had reached the Piave, where, checked by the strong flood, he had been caught by the Austrians and shot. For this reason, the Duc d'Aosta had forbidden our Paolo di Carlo to go over. News of this kind caused us to redouble our preparations for effecting a return should the machine be lost. Perhaps the details were over-prepared. For swimming the river, if that became necessary, we each wore a Gieve waistcoat, and in order to know where to recross we

paid two visits by night to a regular ferry post which the Italians had established not far from Ciano. The stream here is about two hundred yards broad with an island in the middle ; from the Italian side to this island there was a rope, and a telephone extended beyond, in fact to well within the Austrian lines. This was the way we were to come in case of need, and I anticipated no difficulty, for about fifteen Italian prisoners were using this means of escape every week.

A touching little incident, which I commend to the notice of the belated hate-mongers who are still to be found here and there, occurred on our second visit. A raid was in progress, and at 3 a.m. when we arrived some fifty Arditi, or assault troops, had just returned, bringing their solitary prisoner, a poor little Bosniak boy of about seventeen, who could neither speak nor understand any language available at the moment. He made clear, however, that his only desire was to get something to eat, and his craving was quickly satisfied by a big Italian sergeant, who produced for him a loaf of bread which he just devoured, reaping in the meanwhile the crop of cheap cigarettes offered to him on all sides. He was as wretched in appearance and as scantily paid as the Italian soldiers themselves, and understood nothing of the war, nor why his superiors had dragged him from his father's farm to the trenches. Here he was meeting much unexpected kindness from men whom he had been taught to think of as enemies. I wondered how far a belief in the International was forming in his mind.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### AN AIR-FIGHT IN THE DARK

Now let me deal with the most important of all our preparations, those for navigation in complete darkness. It would have been a comparatively easy task on a moonlit night to cross over to the field we had selected. It had frequently been photographed to familiarise us with its form and to ascertain that no recent camps or settlements had been made in it. But we were hotly opposed to the use of moonlight, and indeed it was a very just opposition. Any risk of not finding our way over and not returning safely to the aerodrome could be nothing compared with the tremendous dangers which were faced by the agent. However plausible his story might be, a man seen descending from the sky by night into the enemy lines at the end of a parachute would stand no chance. It was essential, therefore, that he should not be seen, which meant that a pitch-black night must be selected. This, of course, made our task of finding the way somewhat more difficult. I have no doubt Barker, who knew every inch of the country, would have got through without the elaborate preparations we made, but as our Italian employers wished by the scheme not only to drop the agent but to convince

all and sundry that the plan was quite feasible, it was imperative that no risks whatever should be run. Had anything happened to us the chance of a second attempt would have vanished.

I therefore set to work with the navigation problem, to make assurance doubly sure. In general we were to pick our way by means of searchlights at fixed points. We had first a considerable journey from Villaverla, near Thiene, to the lower Piave, where we were to cross into enemy territory. Obviously the safe thing to do was to mark out our course so that it covered as many aerodromes as happened to be on that route. In this way, if the cranky old S.P. 4 gave out we hoped to get down safely finding the aerodrome and landing by the searchlights. That was the first of our needs. The next thing was to have the lights so arranged that by their line they directed us to the point at which we were aiming, for we could not in the darkness rely on the usual guiding marks, such as white roads, towns or water. My original idea had been to have two lines of lights on our side which, if prolonged, would converge on the objective. This scheme, however, proved too complicated, and in the end we had three lights placed on a line, surveyed by the engineers and so fixed as to give us the direction if other means should fail. So much for the guiding stars.

Now all searchlights are much alike, and next came the question of identifying the individuals so that we might know which was which and therefore where we were. At any moment strange beams might arise to confuse us. So we set about baptising. Every light was provided with a field wireless

telegraphic outfit and staff, codes were agreed, and a "call sign" or name given to each section. This means to say that I in the machine with a wireless transmitter could communicate by code with every one of our searchlights, asking its name, and giving it directions as to what it should do, the searchlight replying either by movement of its beam or by flashing letters in the Morse code.

As well as serving for signposts, the searchlights were to illuminate the ground while the machine landed or took off. For instance, at Villaverla the light was planted at the leeward end of the aerodrome, its beam being turned to windward so as to show up the whole field. Barker taxied up to the light, turned his tail into it, and so we took off up wind, flying along the beam. As soon as we were in the air, the light was available to shoot up a vertical ray on request, making a characteristic movement to show us that it marked Villaverla. What was done at Villaverla could be done at any of the other aerodromes where searchlights were fixed. Needless to say all this signalling involved a considerable amount of practice and the use of trained operators with each section. Its success, however, was complete, as will be seen in a moment.

There was a system of motor cyclists organised in case the wireless by any chance broke down or the enterprise had to be abandoned. The other emergency system of communication was by means of Verrey lights. Red cartridges were to be fired in case the machine desired to make a forced landing at any of the intermediate aerodromes. It will be seen, therefore, that for the successful launching of this

one man, preparations were made involving the employment for more than twenty-four hours of a force of about sixty officers and men.

The S.P. 4 having been got into order and the feasibility of the idea having been proved, there was nothing to do but to take one trial flight over the lines to inspect the spot where our man was to be dropped and then make the actual endeavour. For the trial flight Barker selected a Bristol fighter, and about midnight on July 28th we took off and flew without much incident to Nervesa and across the Piave at a spot easily identified by means of the bridges. At this time, of course, there was some moon, but it was waning and due to disappear entirely ten days later. By means of the railway we picked our way to the large field which had been photographed with so much care as being intended for the descent. As we were taking a look round we became the object of interested attention from two searchlights at a little town near by. It produces a queer feeling thus to be hunted for in the air; it must be the feeling of the mouse in a crevice, who sees the cat's eye turned in its direction. However, the temptation to enjoy an adventure was too strong and we decided we would go a little lower and "shoot up" one of the lights, for they formed excellent targets. Accordingly we did so, and drove the operator away or at any rate caused him to drowse his glim. What we had overlooked was the presence in our ammunition of a certain proportion of "tracer" bullets which, when fired, shone like meteors and assisted the other searchlights very soon to find us. They actually got us in the beam and followed us on our course, creating in

me a real sinking of heart. Barker, however, was more than their equal. Suddenly he very cleverly turned back with a steep bank and we both laughed to see the futile beam chasing us in a false direction. It reminded me irresistibly of the policeman pursuing the nimble urchin who had doubled round the corner. However, the moral was clear. Don't use tracer bullets against searchlights.

After this incident we turned, intending to make for home. As we passed over the Italian aerodromes, their searchlights were pretty active. Naturally, hearing a machine, they sought to find it and sent up a challenging flash. My job was by means of our tail light—which with our navigating lights was turned on immediately we got back on our side—to send an agreed code letter and so prove to the Italians that we were friends. However, on this occasion my efforts were useless, for about thirty rays came up round Castelfranco, which none of my quivering signals were able to extinguish. An active display of Archie soon made the reason obvious. We had run into an enemy air raid. Archie by night has a much smarter appearance than by day. By day he is only a puffy brown ball, by night he is a scintillating diamond. We were soon forming part of a pyrotechnic display. The excitement was too much for my pilot, who immediately climbed into the thick of it, hoping that at last our chance had come and that we should be able to bring down one of the night raiders; a feat which on our front had only once been credited to an airman. However, though we flew to and fro in the battle for about three-quarters of an hour, and although at one time we saw one of the bombers passing



above us in the clouds, in fact we got a shot at no one, and returned after two-and-a-half hours in the air to our friends, who had already made up their minds that we had been caught and brought down by the barrage. This, however, was a pure side show.

Everything was promising well for the final attempt at the real job, when a storm wrecked the hangar at Villaverla and destroyed parts of the S.P. 4. I was heartbroken. It appeared that after all our efforts we were about to fail. Lorries were sent off to Verona and stores commissioned from Turin. Determined efforts had their reward and on August 9th the machine was declared fit for flying.

That evening we all went down to the aerodrome full of expectation. The night was utterly dark, save for flashes from a cannonade which was going on somewhere on the Front, illuminating from time to time the ridges of the mountains. Our spy had arrived, one Alessandro Tandura; no curly-haired, blue-eyed hero to look at, but rather undersized, and dark, with the curious close-knit, hard-bitten, almost deformed appearance which belongs to mountaineers. Yet he was by far the bravest man I have ever known. Even his early history with the Army proves his courage. He was a volunteer almost immediately Italy joined in the War. In July, 1915, he was wounded and declared permanently disabled, but he "wangled" himself into the Army again as a private in the Machine Gun Corps, not exactly a soft job. A year later, in July, 1916, he was wounded a second time and given a commission as lieutenant. The next year he was a third time wounded, and ordered a year of convalescence. His only reply was to work

his passage somehow into the trenches, where everyone was welcome after the disaster of Caporetto. Such was the previous war record of the man who undertook this dangerous mission, which was, incidentally, his first flight in an aeroplane. The Eighth Army Corps gave him his instructions. He was to get back to his native town near Vittorio ; collect information of the movements, dispositions and intentions of the enemy ; above all get in touch with the Italian prisoners of war who had escaped and were hiding among the peasantry ; and by means of pigeons and signals communicate all he could learn to Italian Headquarters. Of the rest of the work the major part fell on Barker. He had to fly an unmanageable old machine in pitch darkness a distance of some eighty miles in all and make the difficult take-offs and landings.

My duties were to superintend in the air the plans I had made for identifying our position and destination, to drop Tandura at the right moment and without risk of him catching in the machine, and to keep in touch with the numerous crews of the searchlights and W.T. stations. Should we come down I had, of course, a part to play in the destruction of our machine and in our escape.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### WE DROP TANDURA

THE night was not favourable, for there were low clouds and the promise of a storm. However, Barker's vim was unquenchable, and we decided at any rate to make a trial flight, although for this purpose we did not carry Tandura. Half-an-hour's tour round the country convinced us that the machine was in good order, and, moreover, enabled me to test my signalling which worked perfectly and proved that I was able to call up from miles distant a vertical searchlight beam on the aerodrome and thereby find our landing again without the slightest difficulty.

Operating wireless by night in the air imparts a sense of almost supernatural power. To begin with, there is the difference between night and day flying. It is the difference between coastwise and trans-oceanic navigation. Imagine the first sailor, in his coracle, putting forth from the shore. He faced indeed the perils of the deep, but was always in sight of what he regarded as his natural element. However expert he became, so long as he remained a mere coaster, steering by shore-marks, and with a possible refuge always at hand, he was only a landsman on the water. That is day flying. Columbus passing from

the country he saw to another he merely believed in, gazing for months on nothing but water, made the ocean his true element. That is night flying. Vision it is that creates the difference. By night, especially a moonless night, the earth disappears there is only the air, with its excellent loneliness, undiscovered by the mere day flier. In it you live and move, and from it you approach the earth as if it were some new continent. And the new continent is discovered, and this is the added marvel of wireless telegraphy, not by the sharp sight of a look-out man but by sheer magic. You tap a key tied to a bit of wire hanging in space, and in reply your harbour suddenly appears with lighthouses to steer you in ; twinkling lamps to surround the mooring of your ship ; friends clustered to welcome you. All these blessings out of impenetrable nothingness. Aladdin's lamp is a puny wonder beside this.

But to come to earth. We landed after the trial trip and sent for our heroic friend. Next we rang up the authorities and obtained leave to make the attempt if we thought the weather justified it. It certainly was a case of "now or never." After all the trouble that had been taken and all the obstacles that had been surmounted, if we had not started then I doubt whether we should ever have gone. Tandura was taken to the hut and the slings of the parachute fixed. His peasant's clothes were put in his knapsack, and his spade with which to bury his incriminating belongings was strapped on him in such a way that it would not in the swift descent fly up and stun him. All the paraphernalia was packed into my seat, the hand-electric lamp, a revolver, shell dressing, Verey

lights, wire cutters, maps, two bombs to throw (as camouflage of the real object of the flight), the fuse and detonators for the guncotton, and an "extra" which Barker insisted upon having, namely, a bag full of Mills' bombs, with which he imagined himself rather an expert performer. These last he hung by his own seat, and I thought it rather a dangerous proceeding.

They bring out Tandura, who kisses his commanding officer; sheds tears; is attached by a long rope to the parachute which is slung beneath the machine; is sat on his trap-door; is instructed to fold his arms (this to prevent him gripping the sides of the aeroplane should he lose his nerve), and all is ready. "How do you feel, Tandura?" I shout. "Benissimo, Signor Capitano." These farewells are drowned as the engines are started up and the machine begins to rumble across the field in the direction of the searchlight. Here she is twisted into line by the manipulation of her two engines; an errant cow is shooed off the course; flying speed is secured; and up we go, just scraping over the tops of the men's huts and the trees. Now is the beginning of two hours of the keenest excitement it is possible to imagine. As soon as we are clear of the aerodrome we must pick up our next guiding light. Judge of my elation when, having let out the aerial and worked away with my signals, I see a beam shoot up ten miles away, marking our first stage. Having got that light we can let the first go, so a wireless message is accordingly sent and the Villaverla light is suddenly extinguished. At the second stage we call up the third and then the fourth. There is a hitch with the fourth, I know not

why, but it obstinately refuses to shine. The fifth and sixth, however, are now visible and two and three are turned out so as not to make a great show and excite curiosity among the Huns.

The clouds, which have been low all the evening, become more threatening, and it looks as though we are going to fly in the face of a blinding storm. The night is inky dark, which is greatly to our advantage, and what is even more in our favour is the vivid lightning, which every few seconds shows up the whole of the country beneath us as plainly as at midday. We are, of course, at no great height, so that we can identify in these flashes everything we see. We cross the Piave. My duty is now to get in the aerial as fast as possible, for it is only needed for our messages and no more communication with our lights will be made for some time. If these 200 feet of wire are hanging out when the parachute is let go, heaven help poor Tandura. It is with a view of such a shocking mishap that the wire clippers are hung in their canvas bag before me. Now the aerial is wound in, and the next thing is to get the iron frame lowered so that the parachute with its launching disc and case are fixed at some feet below the wheels of our under-carriage. This frame is lowered by a tackle and goes down pulling hard as the wind catches it and creates a fierce pressure. I let out the rope, hand over hand, and finally make fast to the strong cleat in the open floor of my little cockpit. Everything is now ready. We are over the town which is our landmark, the searchlights have begun to look for us and they could hardly have failed to know we were there, for we might have awakened the dead with the terrible rumble of those

two engines. Barker is to make a signal to me with his foot when he is ready. I sit down on the two bombs, with my hand on the thick ash handle which by means of a long wire controls the bolt under Tandura's seat. Barker slightly stalls the machine, the foot presses, I pull, and wait. No jerk, no apparent result. The bolts have stuck! I pull again. The wire slacks with a rush, the machine shivers and resumes its course. I peep hurriedly through the floor, and imagine I catch a glimpse of a small black sphere flying past behind us, but that is all. That is the consummation of two months of hard work. For good or ill, Tandura is gone. In a few seconds he will alight, perhaps in safety, perhaps into the very hands of his enemies. But we have done our part. His fate is settled so far as we are concerned.

Our business now is to get home and to keep out of the rays of those inquisitive lights. There is no such doubling back with a bulky two engine S.P. 4 as there was with a handy Bristol. As we pass the railway I chuck overboard my two bombs. They fall in fields and explode harmlessly enough, and I hope convince the Austrians that our raid is nothing but a feeble bombing effort. If we had come down there was a third bomb in the machine to prove we were acting strictly within the accepted rules of war. We pass back over the river and there is nothing left now but to reach Villaverla. This is not such an easy matter as appears. The aerial is reeled out, and we dismiss lights Nos. 5 and 6. With gratifying swiftness they vanish, and we picture them packing up and returning to their billets. And so with the others. Barker and I have some little discussion about one light which we

# NAVY OF CALIFORNIA



IN THE BACKGROUND, MACHINE FITTED WITH SPECIAL APPARATUS  
FOR DROPPING MAN WITH PARACHUTE. [Page 302.]



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call up, and of which we cannot decide the locality. This is precisely the difficulty which had been foreseen, a light which we cannot identify. So my efforts were not wasted after all. I send a message asking its name. It commences a *pas seul*, which immediately gives us the required information. At once we know where we are. And so from stage to stage, till from ten miles away I call for the last light. Up it shoots in a bright vertical beam. In a few moments we are landing. In a quarter of an hour we are motoring home to bed.

## CHAPTER XLV

### THE LIFE OF A SPY

I AM sure my readers would wish to hear what became of the gallant Tandura. Some weeks later we learned that messages were being received from him, which was a great relief, for it had seemed almost certain that that dark moment when he was launched into the air was his last. The rest of his story he related when the War was over. "I seemed to sleep," he said, "as I rose to a height of 10,000 feet"—I think this is rather higher than we went—"and when I least expected it I suddenly found myself thrown into the void. Then I had the impression of being uplifted. I raised my eyes and I saw that the parachute was open; I screwed up my courage to look below and could perceive country roads I knew well. I raised my eyes again and waited. A sudden blow in the chest apprised me that I was landed, my feet in the air. I had been thrown from a height of 500 metres and had fallen on a vine. In the meantime it was raining very hard." It took Tandura two hours, so he said, to recover from his stunning and to bury his parachute and his officer's uniform. Then he put on peasants' clothes and, with his knapsack on his back, ready for any surprise, determined to clear off as

quickly as possible. He decided to swim the river Meschio, but had miscalculated his strength, and in order to get through the swollen waters was compelled to throw off his knapsack, thus losing both his food and his revolver. He reached the opposite bank in safety and then, overwrought and tired to death, he fell asleep under a hedge.

Here begins the wonderful story of how he was hidden from August to October by the devotion of his family and of the peasantry. A woman woke him and offered him shelter in her cottage, at what risk to herself it is impossible to say. Tandura's explanation was that he was an escaped prisoner, a native of Vittorio. The brave woman went to Vittorio and gave the news to his family and to his sweetheart. By the afternoon of the morrow the sister and *fiancée* had arrived and, after a touching interview, set about collecting the information the spy needed. At eight o'clock that evening Tandura made his way to Col del Pel, the spot at which we had agreed that his signals were to be shown.

For three days he waited and on the fourth an aeroplane actually came, but failed to see his signals spread in a deserted field. How then was he to get his messages back? How was he to live? Nine more days followed, each full of anxiety, for he had collected important news which must be sent over. Finally, on August 26th, a machine was heard, heralded, even if, in the still night, the engine had been inaudible, by the heavy work of the Archie batteries. Friends were trying to communicate, but they were forced to throw out the bag of food and carrier pigeons at hazard, for Tandura had no time to show his position

by a light. All night long therefore he hunted for the parcel without success, and at dawn in despair offered money to some country children to search for it and bring it to him. That same afternoon one of them came round to the cottage with a carrier pigeon, an incriminating find. At last messages could be sent to the Italian Command. On these messages the operations were based, in consequence of which Tandura gained the title of "Author of the Battle of Vittorio." It was another two months, however, before liberation came to him, and throughout this period his escapes were remarkable. First, some friends of his who had got away from Austrian captivity found and gave him the other pigeon which the aeroplane had dropped. One day he was arrested and confined by Austrian gendarmes and deprived of his money, 1,700 crowns. In the night, however, he climbed over the wall of his prison and escaped, despite a vigorous fusillade from the sentry. Then followed more help from his family and from a hidden priest who had been a chaplain of the 11th Bersaglieri and to whom Tandura confided the secret of his mission. On September 5th another supply of pigeons arrived by means of which he asked for more money. This was almost his undoing. The aeroplane returned and dropped a bag of food and money, but a wretched peasant picked it up and refused to hand it over, threatening at the same time to denounce Tandura to the Austrians. Finally the peasant was persuaded to give up 800 crowns and ten pigeons, keeping the rest for himself. That very night, however, Tandura heard whispered to him in his place of concealment the warning words, "Beware the wolf." This was the

signal known only to secret agents and never to be used save in the moment of direst peril. It came just in time to enable him to quit the house before it was surrounded by gendarmes. Later in the day he returned and received from the sky, by means of signs made by rounds of machine-gun fire, the news that he was to go to a certain field between the Tagliamento and the Cellina, where he would be picked up and taken home by an aeroplane. Anxious to bid farewell to his dear ones, he went back to the cottage, only to fall into the hands of gendarmes, by whom he was handcuffed and dragged off to the Austrian headquarters. As they supposed he was merely an escaped prisoner, they put him on to the ordinary tasks of carrying ammunition and of general labour, which he varied, according to his own account, by clipping here and there a telephone or telegraph wire, and committing what sabotage he could on a teleferic railway. Finally he got away a second time, and wandered about the fields, glad of a bit of bread or a spoonful of polenta. At last, on October 25th, half-starved and ill, he decided that there was nothing for it but to go back to his cottage and take the consequences. He need have feared nothing. The Italian offensive was beginning.

The rest is soon told. He organised escaped prisoners, got arms for them, and in the end met the advanced guard of his compatriots in his little native town of Serravalle. At first his story was not believed, but he asked to be taken to Headquarters and there the truth was well known. His epic adventures were crowned with the embraces and tears of the General.

Here is the description from the Official Gazette

of the reasons for the conferment on Lieut. Alessandro Tandura of the Gold Medal for Valour, the highest award for bravery known to the Italian Army :

“ Offertosi spontaneamente, per altissimo sentimento patrio, ad una missione estremamente rischiosa irta di difficoltà incredibili e di pericoli continui, la conduceva a termine con sereno ardimento e con fede sagace rendendo segnalati servizi alle truppe operanti.”

The dropping of our spy friend and hero was the last piece of active service I was privileged to share in during the War. I received not long after that adventure an urgent note to the effect that in my constituency the Home Front was very hard pressed and that if I did not make some appearance I might forfeit my seat in Parliament. Accordingly I returned to England some eight weeks before the Armistice.

\* \* \* \* \*

This story should end here. But I may perhaps be allowed to add that after all I was compelled, most reluctantly, to sever a political connection with East London which had existed in my family for three generations and of which I was very proud. My political service, therefore, was about to come to an abrupt end after thirteen years, when the Burgh of Leith, with true Scottish hospitality, received me as its Member and thus enabled me to resume Parliamentary work, which I have always thought to be, after soldiering in war-time, the most useful and honourable form of public service.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
RICHARD CLAY AND SONS, LIMITED,  
BRUNSWICK STREET, STAMFORD STREET, S.E. 1,  
AND SUNGAY, SUFFOLK.







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